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FROM

Dr. J. R. Chadwick

LETTERS

ON

THE GOSPELS.

BY MISS HANNAH ADAMS.

CAMBRIDGE:

PRINTED BY HILLIARD AND METCALF.

1824.

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Apr. 2 1900

DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, *to wit:*

District Clerk's Office.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the fifth day of November, A. D. 1824, and in the forty-ninth year of the Independence of the United States of America, Hannah Adams, of the said district, has deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof she claims as author, in the words following, *to wit:*

Letters on the Gospels. By Miss Hannah Adams.

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;" and also to an act, entitled "An act supplementary to an act, entitled 'An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;' and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints."

JOHN W. DAVIS,
Clerk of the District of Massachusetts.

37-219

PREFACE.

THE author of the following Letters, as she advances in age, feels an increasing interest in the welfare of her young relatives. Aware that she must, before long, be taken from them, she was induced to prepare this little work, in order that she might leave it to them as a token of her solicitude for their improvement and happiness. She hopes it may be useful to them, and to other young persons, by directing their attention to the Gospel of Christ, and enabling them to read the New Testament with more pleasure and advantage, and that they may be induced to make the sacred Scriptures the object of their daily study, the rule of their life, and their guide to everlasting happiness.

As these Letters were intended for the young, the author had no higher view in their literary execution, than to render them intelligible, and

suited to youthful capacities. She has reason to be grateful for the favour with which her former writings have been received; and now submits these Letters to the candour of the public, with the hope that they may be beneficial to those for whom they were particularly designed.

In compiling this little work the following authors have been consulted:

Doddridge's Expositor, Macknight's Harmony of the Gospels, Whitby's Annotations, Kenrick's Expositor, Campbell's Translation of the Gospels, Clark's Commentary, Wakefield's Translation of the New Testament, Priestley's Harmony of the Gospels, Harwood's Introduction to the New Testament, Jones' Illustrations of the Gospels, Cappe's Life of Christ, Fleury's Ancient Israelites, Allen's Modern Judaism, Watson's Tracts, Lardner's Works, Hunter's Observations on the History of Jesus Christ, Wait's Gospel History, Newcome's Observations on the Character of our Lord, Blair's Discourses on the Sermon on the Mount, Jortin's Sermons, Buckminster's Sermons, Porteus' Lectures, Priestley's Notes on Scripture, Fellow's Guide to Im-

mortality, Calmet's Dictionary, Harmer's Illustrations, Paxton's Illustrations of Scripture, Burder's Oriental Customs, Jahn's Archæology, Harris's Natural History of the Bible, Bulkley on the Parables, Gray on the Parables, Clarke's Travels, Newton on the Prophesies, Simpson on Christianity.

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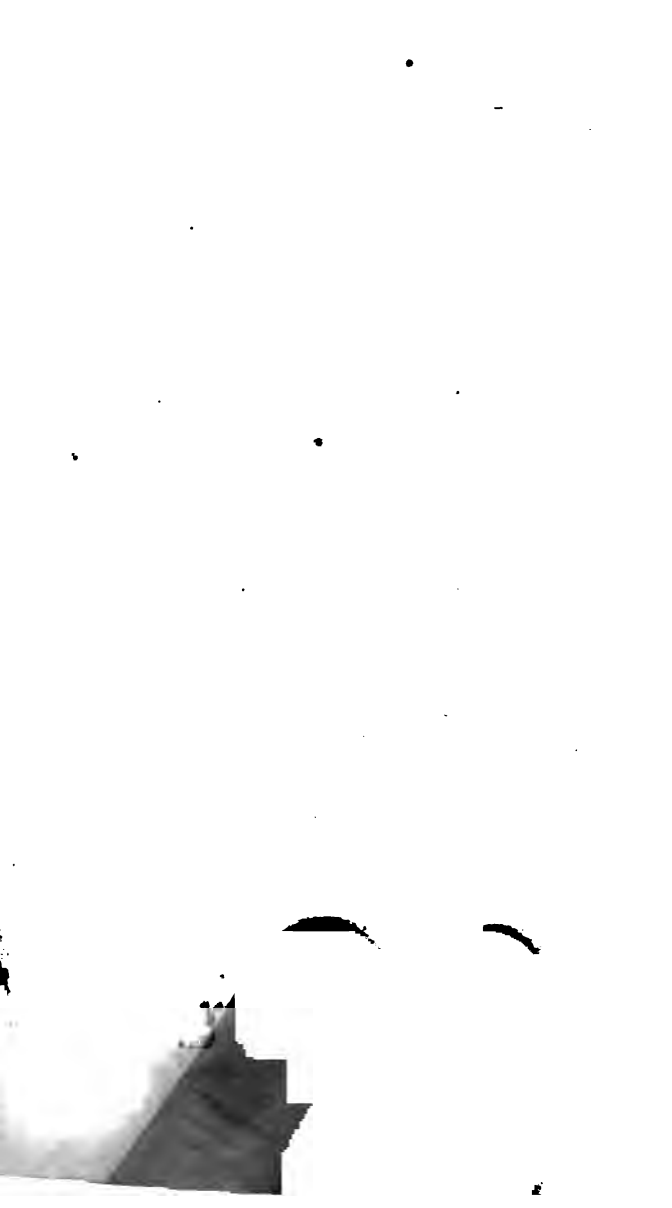
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LETTERS ON THE GOSPELS.

LETTER I.

The Importance of studying the New Testament.

My dear Nieces,

From your earliest years, you have been the objects of my tenderest solicitude; and your advancement in virtue and knowledge lies near my heart. I am gratified with the proficiency you have made in several branches of useful learning; but I entreat you not to forget, that the knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures, particularly of the New Testament, is infinitely more important than any other kind of knowledge. The Gospel is emphatically styled "glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." While attentively perusing the New Testament, always

fluence of letters and philosophy were diffused over countries, which before had been enveloped in darkness and ignorance.

Yet though science and literature flourished in the Augustian age, mankind were still sunk in gross ignorance, both of religion and morals. St. Paul declares that, "The world by wisdom knew not God." The Apostle appears to allude to those Grecian philosophers, who were numerous in Athens; and who, under the name of *Sophists*, that is, *professors of wisdom*, undertook to teach every science. They valued themselves on their ability to defend either side of any question, political or moral; and it was often their glory to make the worse appear the better reason.

All the nations of the earth were devoted to polytheism and superstition. A general belief prevailed, that all things were subordinate to powerful beings, who were called gods, and whom it was thought incumbent upon all who wished for prosperity, to worship and to conciliate. Among the Greeks and Romans, one of these gods, Jupiter, was supposed to excel the others in dignity, and to possess a super-

eminent authority, and perhaps, in some degree, to direct and govern the tasks and offices of inferior deities.

Every nation, however, had its own peculiar gods, differing from those of other countries, in their names, natures, and attributes, and in many other respects. But in process of time, the Greeks and Romans became as ambitious in their religious, as in their political claims; and maintained that their gods, though under different appellations, were the objects of religious worship to all nations. Therefore they gave the names of their deities to those of other countries.

The principal objects of adoration, in most nations, were deified human beings; either heroes, or kings, or the founders of empires, or others who had obtained celebrity by remarkable actions, or useful inventions. These illustrious persons were remembered by their posterity, with fear, gratitude, and reverence, which caused them to be exalted to the rank of gods.

Together with these, the sun, moon, and stars, were worshipped by various nations,

and this appears to have been a very ancient form of idolatry. But in time, the objects of worship were multiplied. The mountains and rivers, the earth and sea, even the diseases of the body, the virtues and vices, (or, rather, the tutelar genii, who were regarded as presiding over these things,) were made the objects of adoration. In Egypt, divine honors were paid to animals, and even to noxious and venomous reptiles.

The most magnificent temples were raised, and dedicated, by the inhabitants of almost every country, to their gods. The statues, and other representations of their deities, were placed in these superb edifices; and it was supposed, that the god for whom they designed the statue, was really present in it, if the dedication was properly made. The temples were furnished with altars, and other requisites for sacrifice.

The care of the temples, and the direction of all religious ordinances, were committed to an order of men, called priests, who were distributed into various classes. They were supposed to possess a high degree of sanctity,

and had much influence and power; but they abused their authority to delude an ignorant people. They did not attempt to promote the practice of virtue, either by their precepts or their example; but indulged themselves in licentiousness; and taught others, that the whole of religion was comprised in observing the rites and ceremonies inculcated by their ancestors.

The heathen worship consisted of various rites, such as sacrifices with prayer, and other observances. Animals were universally offered, and human victims were sometimes immolated. The prayers of the Pagans were not unfrequently addressed to their gods, expressly for the purpose of obtaining the blessing of the heavenly powers upon immoral and infamous undertakings. Even the gods and goddesses whom they adored, as their characters and actions were commonly represented, exhibited to their deluded worshippers, examples rather of scandalous crimes, than of purity and virtue.

None of the various systems of the heathen religion appear to have been adapted to in-

spire love and respect for virtue, or to promote its practice. There were stately temples, pompous ceremonies, expensive sacrifices, and magnificent festivals; but just notions of God, obedience to his moral laws, purity of heart, and sanctity of life, were not insisted upon as requisites in religious worship.

The doctrines of the immortality of the soul, and of a future state of rewards and punishments, were very partially received, in a form very vague and unsatisfactory; and the opinions maintained on this subject were more adapted to administer indulgence to vice, than support and encouragement to virtue.

The consequence of this wretched theology was, a universal corruption of manners, which exhibited itself in the most atrocious crimes. The sports of the gladiators, the grossest debauchery, the licentiousness of divorce, the custom of exposing infants, and other horrid practices, prove that the colours are not too dark, which the apostle Paul employs in drawing the character of the heathen nations. See Romans i. Ephesians vi. 17, &c.

When mankind had abandoned themselves to

the most atrocious crimes, and appeared to have lost almost all sense of moral obligation, God was graciously pleased to send his Son, to reform and save the world. "When the fulness of time was come," our Lord appeared upon earth, "a light to enlighten the gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel."

LETTER III.

Of the civil and religious State of the Jewish Nation at the Time of Christ's Birth.

My dear Nieces,

I will now give you an outline of the civil and religious state of the Hebrew nation, at the time of our Lord's advent.

Jerusalem had been taken by Pompey the Great, about seventy years before the birth of our Saviour. The Jews, at this period, were governed by Herod the Great, who received his kingdom from, and was himself tributary to the Romans. This prince was one of the greatest tyrants that ever disgraced humanity. After having destroyed all the descendants of the illustrious Asmonæan family, (who, from the time of Judas Maccabæus, had governed Judea for 129 years,) he began to exhibit a marked contempt for the religion and laws of the Jews. He abolished several of the ceremonies enjoined in the Mosaic code; and in-

troduced some foreign customs, which were expressly forbidden by it. He built a magnificent theatre in the city of Jerusalem, and a spacious amphitheatre in the suburbs, where he instituted public games in honour of Augustus. From the beginning of his reign to the final destruction of the temple, the high priests were set up, and removed, at his pleasure, and that of his successors, or of the Romans. He attacked the authority of the grand Sanhedrim, which, by degrees, lost its power. He adopted, in his ordinary habits, Roman customs and usages; and, in his public capacity, was devoted and subservient to that mighty empire. Through his influence Roman luxury was introduced into Palestine, accompanied with all the vices of that licentious people. In a word, Judea groaned under all the corruption and misery which might be expected from a prince who, though a Jew in outward profession, was, in practice, a contemner of all laws, human and divine. The murder of the children of Bethlehem, recorded by the Evangelists, is a strong exemplification of his cruel and jealous temper.

After Herod had amassed a vast treasure by unjust extortions and confiscations, he proposed to regain the favour of the Jewish nation, by rebuilding their temple on a larger and more splendid plan, with many additional ornaments. This magnificent edifice was not considered as distinct from the temple of Zerubbabel, the same general model being adopted. The Jews themselves still regarded it as the sacred temple, and as that which, according to the prophecy of Haggai, was to exceed Solomon's in glory, by the appearance in it of the Messiah.

On the death of Herod, the government was divided between his three sons. Judea and Samaria were given to Archelaus, whose oppressive administration induced the Jews and Samaritans to write a petition to the emperor, in consequence of which he was deposed, and Judea reduced to a Roman province. The governors, appointed by the Romans, were unjust, avaricious, and tyrannical. The Hebrew nation considered it an intolerable grievance to pay tribute to Cæsar, and to live in subjection to idolaters. The extortion of the

publicans, who were entrusted with the collection of the revenues, and who abused their authority, became a subject of extreme dissatisfaction. The constant presence of their governors, with foreign attendants and a Roman guard, quartered with their Eagles in the heart of the Holy city, kept the sensibility of the Jews continually on the rack. They considered every thing they held sacred as polluted, and brought into contempt. The sufferings of that portion of the Holy Land, however, which remained under the government of the other sons of Herod, who were cautious of irritating their feelings, were not so intolerable.

The authority of the Roman government did not, however, extend to the entire deprivation of all the civil and ecclesiastical privileges of the Jews. They were permitted to live very much according to their own laws; and were allowed to inflict punishments, less than capital, for offences against their religion. They could expel offenders from their synagogues, and require them to be beaten. And not only does it appear that, during our Lord's ministry, they had agreed, that "if any man

did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue;" but they actually excommunicated the man who was born blind, and whose sight was restored by the word of Jesus. (John ix.) They had power also to bind men, and to keep them in custody; and their council could summon witnesses, take examinations, and, in the case of capital offenders, convey them before the Roman governors, who were the constituted judges in cases of this kind. The administration of their sacred rites and ceremonies was committed, as before, to the High Priest and Sanhedrim; the former of whom had the superintendence of the other priests and Levites. The form of external worship, prescribed by the Mosaic law, was still continued in the temple at Jerusalem; and a vast concourse of people uniformly assembled, at the stated seasons, for celebrating their solemn festivals. But many learned writers have observed, that even in the service of the temple, various ceremonies and observances, derived from the religious worship of the heathens, had been introduced, and blended with those of divine

appointment. Nor was this all. Even the duties enforced by the decalogue were explained away, by a frivolous and immoral casuistry.

But the remains of liberty and happiness, which the Romans left to the Jews, were effectually taken from the great body of the people, by their own rulers. The leaders of the people were, according to Josephus, profligate wretches, who purchased their places by bribes, or other acts of iniquity; and maintained their ill-acquired authority, by the most abominable crimes.

The national council, or Sanhedrim, was composed of men of different religious sects, who had imbibed all the prejudices of party, and were more intent upon the gratification of private pique, or ambition, than the advancement of religion, or the promotion of the public welfare. A similar degree of depravity prevailed among the inferior ministers of religion. The common people, instigated by the bad examples of their superiors, plunged into every kind of iniquity; and by their frequent seditions, robberies, and murders, armed against them both the justice of God and the vengeance of man.

But notwithstanding the general corruption of the Hebrew nation, at the time of our Saviour's appearance, there still remained splendid examples of piety and virtue. Among these we find Zacharias and Elizabeth, the aged Simeon, Anna the prophetess, and others, whose names are recorded with honor in the New-Testament, all of whom placed implicit confidence in the prophecies of God, and waited with devout expectation for the redemption of Israel. At the time of our Saviour's advent, the great body of the Jewish nation were earnestly expecting their promised Messiah; but they looked not for a spiritual teacher, but a temporal monarch, who would free them from the Roman yoke, aggrandize their nation, render Jerusalem the metropolis of the world, and after subduing all their enemies, commence a glorious reign of peace and prosperity.

An account of the various religious sects and parties, which existed among the Hebrew nation at the time when the Son of God was born, and during his ministry, will be the subject of another letter.

LETTER IV.

Of the various religious Sects which flourished in Palestine during the time of our Lord's Ministry.

My dear Nieces,

When the Son of God appeared upon earth, various religious sects prevailed in Palestine; and the hatred which subsisted between them, augmented the calamities of the Hebrew nation.

Of the origin of the Samaritans, who may be regarded, in some sort, as a Jewish sect, we find an account in 2 Kings, chapter xvii. the 24th and following verses. After the ten tribes who inhabited Samaria were carried into captivity, about 720 years before Christ, the king of Assyria repeopled the country with heathen colonies. These mixed with the remains of the former inhabitants. They brought with them their pagan idolatries; but apprehending that they had been exposed to

the vengeance of the God of Israel, whom they regarded as the tutelary god of the land, on account of their neglect of him, they, under the direction of a Hebrew priest who was sent to them, joined his worship with that of their former divinities. At a subsequent period they gave up their idolatry, and worshipped Jehovah alone. They did not, however, resort to the temple at Jerusalem; but built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim. It was with reference to this, that the Samaritan woman said to our Saviour: "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye [Jews] say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." From this and from other causes there was the greatest enmity between them and the proper Jews, to which there are frequent references in the Gospels. They received none of the other books of the Old Testament, except the Pentateuch, or the five first books of Moses.

The *Pharisees* were the most numerous and powerful of the proper Jewish sects. By their superior strictness in ritual observances, and their apparent zeal for religion, they ob-

tained the highest offices, both in the state and priesthood. Their influence over the minds of the people was unbounded, and their authority, both in public and private affairs, almost absolute. The Evangelists frequently mention the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* in conjunction. Hence it appears that the former were chiefly Pharisees. Those were called Scribes who had made the law their particular study, and were considered as particularly skilled in expounding it. The Pharisees were distinguished by their belief in a large body of oral traditions, which they pretended had been regularly transmitted, through a series of ages, from Moses, who received them from God on Mount Sinai. They not only maintained that these traditions were of equal authority with the written Scriptures; but explained the latter by the former, that is, by corrupt glosses and inventions, many of which were intended to evade its obligation. Hence our Lord reproved them for "*making the law of God of no effect by their traditions.*" They taught, that men may perform works of supererogation; and by alms, ablutions, and various ritua

observances, make atonement for sin. It was their doctrine, that impure desires were not wicked, unless they produced wicked actions. They held also, that, while the external circumstances of all the human race were predestinated, their moral character depended on their own free will. According to them, every part of the sacred Scriptures had a spiritual and mystical as well as a plain and obvious sense. They acknowledged the immortality of the soul, a future state of rewards and punishments, and the resurrection of the body. They alleged, that the grounds of justification for the Jews were, the merits of Abraham, the knowledge of God which existed among them, circumcision, and the offering of sacrifices.

The *Sadducees* were much inferior to the Pharisees in number and influence. But part of them were of illustrious families, and others distinguished by their opulence. They received only the Pentateuch, which they interpreted literally, and rejected all traditions. They denied the immortality of the soul, the existence of angels and spirits; and taught that men were perfectly free to do good or

evil. This sect, like the other Jews, expected the Messiah as a temporal deliverer, and impatiently waited for the commencement of his splendid reign, with the hope of participating in his conquests and glory. But their expectations were so contrary to the humble appearance of our Saviour, that they joined their inveterate enemies the Pharisees, in persecuting him and his disciples. The council, before whom both our Lord and St Paul were accused, consisted partly of Sadducees, and partly of Pharisees. In process of time, many of the Sadducees appear to have admitted the immortality of the soul, and the existence of angels; and, in the eighth century, these were denominated *Caraites*. Both the Sadducees and Pharisees were in existence about 150 years before Christ.

The *Essenes* were a sect who despised riches, and led a very recluse and austere life. One branch of this sect passed their lives in celibacy, and devoted themselves to the education of the children of others, whom they adopted. Some of them employed themselves wholly in contemplation; and made it

their constant endeavour to mortify the body, which they considered as the prison of the immortal spirit. Others spent part of their time in performing the duties of active life. The whole of this sect, holding the immortality of the soul, denied the resurrection of the body. They maintained that the words of the law were to be understood in a spiritual sense, and not according to their literal meaning. Hence, they did not offer sacrifices; but were strict in observing the Sabbath, and making an annual present to the temple at Jerusalem. The leading traits in their character were, sobriety, abstemiousness, and peaceableness; and they had all things in common. They forbade oaths, except upon the admission of new members into their society. Then they were solemnly imposed, and held most sacred. The Essenes are not expressly mentioned in the New Testament; but it has been thought that their sentiments are alluded to, and spoken against, by St. Paul, in his first epistle to Timothy, and in the epistle to the Colossians.

The *Herodians* derived their name from Herod the Great, and followed his example in

complying with many heathen customs. They continued attached to the tyrant during his life, and to his sons after his decease. This sect maintained, that it was lawful, when constrained by superiors, to comply with idolatrous customs; and opposed those who strictly adhered to the Mosaic law. It appears that they were chiefly Sadducees; for the same persons who, in one of the Gospels, are called Herodians, are in another, styled Sadducees.

The *Gaulonites*, though not expressly mentioned in the New Testament, existed as a party in the time of our Saviour. The Galileans, whom Pilate slew in the temple, appear to have been of this sect. They derived their name from Judas, a native of Gaulon, in Upper Galilee. He taught that the Jewish nation was the elect of God, and he alone their governor; therefore they ought not to submit to any ordinance of men. In the tenth year of our Lord, he excited his countrymen, the Galileans, and many other Jews, to take up arms, and venture upon all extremities, rather than pay tribute to the

Romans. His followers, however, in their first warlike attempts, were entirely routed and dispersed. Yet so deeply had he infused enthusiasm into their hearts, that they never rested, till they had involved the city and temple in their own destruction.

At the time of our Lord's advent, a large number of the Hebrew nation had imbibed the principles of the Oriental philosophy; one leading article of which was, that all things proceeded by emanation from God, the eternal fountain of being. Zoroaster, a Persian, is supposed to have formed the principles of this philosophy into a regular system. He supposed spirit and matter, light and darkness, to be emanations from one eternal source. These, the active and passive principles, he conceived to be perpetually at variance; the former tending to produce good, and the latter evil; but that, through the intervention of the Supreme Being, the contest would at last terminate in favour of the good principle. It appears that several of the Gnostic sects, by whom the doctrines of the Oriental philosophy were blended with Christianity, were founded

by Jews. The history of the Christian church, by Mosheim, which I wish you to read, after studying the Scriptures, will give you an account of the Eastern notions, and the opinions of the Gnostics.

The rapid increase of the Jewish nation constrained multitudes among them to emigrate from their native country. Hence, in the time of our Lord, they were to be found in every part of the known world. In particular, they were numerous in all the provinces of the Roman empire. The wisdom of divine Providence appeared conspicuous, in the dispersion of a people, to whom alone were committed the oracles of God; that they might be a check to superstition; and thus prepare the way for that clearer discovery of divine truth, which was to enlighten the world from the Gospel of the Son of God.

LETTER V.

Of Palestine, and of the Cities in which our Lord taught, and performed Miracles.

My dear Nieces,

While you are pursuing your study of the New Testament, I would direct your attention to the country in which most of the stupendous miracles, recorded in Scripture, were performed; the land which has been honoured by the residence of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, and, above all, by the immediate presence of the Redeemer of mankind. As the geographical situation of this part of the globe occupies your attention at school, I will only point out some of the remarkable places which have been consecrated by the footsteps of the Son of God.

Various names have been given to this interesting country. It was called *Palestine*, the Philistines or Palestines, with whom, we learn, from sacred history, that the Israelites

had frequent wars, being, at a very early period, the inhabitants of a large part of it. The name *Judea*, is derived from Judah, who possessed the most fertile part of it; and it was called the *Promised Land*, from its being promised to Abraham and his descendants. It is also styled the *Holy Land*, from the unspotted holiness of our Lord, who fixed his residence there during his abode on earth; and as being the place where our holy religion was first taught.

The mother of our Saviour resided at Nazareth, which was considered as his native town; but he was born in Bethlehem, according to the prediction of the Prophet, "And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a governor, who shall rule my people Israel." This city was not considerable for its extent or riches, but derived its glory from being the place of our Lord's nativity. It is about six miles distant from Jerusalem.

Galilee, a fruitful province of Palestine, was most honoured with our Saviour's resi-

dence; it was divided into upper and lower Galilee. In Nazareth, a small village in lower Galilee, he passed the early part of his life, from which he took the name *Nazarene.* It was a custom among the Jews, that when a child was twelve or thirteen years old, he should be examined by the rulers of the synagogue, concerning his proficiency in religion. When our Lord was presented for this purpose to the learned doctors, "all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers."

The Evangelists give no further account of our Saviour, until the time immediately preceding his public ministry, when he went to Bethabara, on the banks of Jordan, and was baptized by John. When our Lord returned to Nazareth, and began to preach in the synagogue, the people at first listened with admiration, and "*wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.*" But when he reproved them for their unbelief, they were offended, and would have put him to death. But he confounded their sight in a miraculous manner, passed through the midst of them

without being perceived, and came to Capernaum.

It appears from the gospel of St. John, ch. i. v. 46, that Nazareth was regarded by the Jews as a very contemptible place. According to Dr. Clarke, a modern traveller, it seems to have retained the same characteristic meanness; and when he visited the town, he found it in a wretched state of indigence and misery. Indeed it is evident from the accounts of the Evangelists, that the other Jews entertained a very contemptible opinion of their Galilean brethren. Of this, one reason was, that lower Galilee was surrounded by Gentile nations; and hence was called "Galilee of the Gentiles." When this province is mentioned in the New Testament, Lower Galilee is generally meant.

Cana of Galilee was so called to distinguish it from another town of the same name, near the city of Sidon. In this little village, our Saviour performed his first miracle, which manifested his glory, and confirmed the faith of his disciples. The remarkable fact which they had witnessed caused them to believe in

him with more stedfastness than they had previously done.

The city of Capernaum is celebrated in the Gospels as the place where our Lord usually resided during the time of his ministry. It stood northeast of the sea of Galilee, and was a convenient port, from whence vessels were continually passing from Galilee to places on the other side of the lake. This city is said, by our Saviour, to be "exalted unto heaven," but, because the inhabitants neglected to improve their distinguished privileges, he declares "it shall be brought down to hell." This awful denunciation has been fully verified; for so far from being the metropolis of Galilee, as it once was, it consisted, a few years since, of only six poor fishermen's huts; and now, perhaps, is wholly uninhabited. The woe denounced upon Chorazin and Bethsaida, where our Lord performed his mighty works, has also been completely accomplished.

The *Sea of Galilee* is so named from that province. It is also called the lake of Genesareth, from a tract of country so styled, which bounded it for a considerable way on the

western side; and the sea of Tiberias, from a town of that name. This sea, or lake, is viewed with veneration by Christians, from its being frequented by Christ and his apostles; and from the account of our Saviour's walking upon its waves. Matt. xiv. 25.

Tabor, a very remarkable mountain in Galilee, is celebrated by travellers for its variety of delightful prospects. It is supposed by some to be the place on which Christ was transfigured, which is styled, by St. Peter, *the Holy Mount*. Others are of opinion, that this wonderful transaction occurred on a mountain in the more northern parts of Galilee, near Cesarea Philippi.

Samaria, a province of Palestine, is situated between Judea and Galilee. Shechem, or Sichar, the capital of Samaria, lies in a narrow valley, between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. In the vicinity of this city, is Jacob's well, celebrated by our Saviour's conversation with a Samaritan woman. (See John iv. 6.) The town is now called *Naplouse*. The Samaritans, at present, are very few in number. As lately as 1808, we learn that they continu-

ed at Naplouse, inhabiting old deserted houses, in the most decayed part of the city; and that their employments just furnished them with bread. There are no Samaritans in the East, excepting at Naplouse and Jaffa; and these amount to two hundred persons, men, women, and children, composing thirty families. Since the year 1788, they have not repaired to Mount Gerizim for worship, but have made their sacrifices in the city of Naplouse.

The province of Judea was celebrated for its capital, *Jerusalem*, which contained *the Temple*, the centre of the Jewish Religion. This city had acquired its greatest extent at the time of its final destruction. It then comprehendcd four hills; Zion, Moriah, Acra, and Bezetha. Zion was in the southern part of the city, and Acra in the northern. Zion was considerably the highest, and that part of the city situated on it, was called the upper city. The temple which Herod the Great rebuilt, with the utmost magnificence, and the other superb buildings with which he adorned his capital, evinced the splendor of the city, when our Saviour appeared to enlighten it with his divine instructions.

Our Lord entered Jerusalem in the character described by the prophet, *just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass.* (See Zechariah ix. 9.) On that memorable occasion, by conforming to the simplicity of the patriarchal ages, he poured contempt on the pride of human glory. He honoured the law, which prohibited the chosen people from multiplying horses, lest they should imbibe the spirit, and engage in the ruinous enterprises, of warlike nations; and he displayed, at the same time, the unaffected meekness and lowliness of his character. He was, however, welcomed by the honours usually paid to kings and emperors. The multitude spread their garments, and strewed green branches in the way, which was the custom in the Eastern countries, when victors returned to their capitals. When our Saviour entered the city, he repaired to the temple, and healed the lame and blind whom he found there.

The *Mount of Olives*, or *Mount Olivet*, derived its name from the number of olive trees with which it was covered. It lay east of Jerusalem, and commanded a full view of the

metropolis, from which it was separated by the river Kidron and the valley of Jehoshaphat. Perhaps no place in the world affords a finer prospect, or is associated with events more sacred or sublime. Here our Saviour beheld the city, wept over it, and predicted its impending ruin. Here also he pronounced the beautiful and affecting apostrophe, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest those who are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." This metaphor is very siriking. When the hen sees a bird of prey coming, she makes a noise to assemble her chickens, that she may shield them with her wings from the danger.* The Roman Eagle was about to fall upon the Jewish state. Our Lord expresses a desire to guard his countrymen from the threatened calamities. But they neglected his invitations and warnings, and fell a prey to their enemies. If we suppose, (and the supposition is highly probable,) that our Lord, while in the act of

* See Harris's Natural History of the Bible.

speaking, pointed to the majestic and stupendous edifices, whose destruction he foretold, every word which he uttered must have derived, from the surrounding scenery, a force and effect, which it is impossible adequately to describe, or even to conceive.

The garden of *Gethsemane*, at the foot of Mount Olivet, was a place to which our Saviour often resorted. There he endured his agony, and was betrayed by Judas. From the summit of this mountain, as is supposed, he ascended to heaven. A large church was anciently built upon this spot, in honour of this glorious event.

Bethany, a village situated about two miles distant from Jerusalem, was built at the foot of the Mount of Olives. It is celebrated as the residence of Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus, whom our Saviour raised from the dead. Jesus was a frequent guest in this distinguished family; and it was here that Mary poured the costly perfume upon his head.

The *Pool of Siloam* furnished with water several pools in Jerusalem, particularly that of

Bethesda, which, for its singular usefulness, was called the *house of mercy*. Here Christ healed the man "who had an infirmity thirty-eight years." In the pool of Siloam he commanded the blind man to wash, and his sight was restored. The pool is at the foot of Mount Moriah, on the south side.

Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem, on the north side, is celebrated for the very interesting conversation of Jesus with two of his disciples, after his resurrection. A church has been built on this spot, where the house of Cleopas is supposed to have stood.

Our blessed Lord completed the great work of redemption, by his death, on *Mount Calvary*, called, in Hebrew, *Golgotha*, which signifies *a place of skulls*. It was anciently appropriated to the execution of malefactors, and shut out by the walls of the city, as an execrable place. This spot, formerly so ignominious, is sanctified by the death of the Redeemer of mankind.

LETTER VI.

Sketch of the History of Jerusalem since the Time of Christ.

My dear Nieces,

I will now give you a brief sketch of the complicated miseries in which Jerusalem was involved after its inhabitants had crucified the Lord of Life, and impiously exclaimed, "*his blood be upon us and our children.*" In my History of the Jews, you may find further information on this subject.

The prophecies of our Saviour, respecting the tremendous calamities and utter ruin of the city and temple, were verified in their utmost extent. The day on which Titus encompassed Jerusalem was the feast of the Passover; and it is deserving of particular attention, that this was the anniversary of that memorable period, when the Jews crucified their Messiah.

After the destruction of the devoted city, multitudes of the Hebrew nation were dis-

persed over the earth, suffering severe persecution, and in a most oppressed and wretched condition. Some, however, still remained in their country, and even in Jerusalem; or rather, in the new buildings which they had erected amidst the ruins of the city. But they were entirely subjected to the Romans, and obliged to pay to the emperor that tribute which devotion had destined annually for the service of the temple.

About the year of our Lord 132, Barchochebas, who pretended to be the Messiah, stimulated his countrymen to revolt against the Romans, and engaged to restore them to their former liberty and glory. The emperor Adrian had sent a colony of heathens to Jerusalem, and proposed to build there a temple to Jupiter. This so exasperated the Jews, that they broke out, under Barchochebas, into open rebellion, which was obstinately maintained. They were, however, at length subjected after a terrible slaughter.

When the war was terminated, Adrian completed his designs respecting Jerusalem. He rebuilt the city, calling it Ælia, after one of

his own names. He erected a temple to Jupiter, where that of Jehovah formerly stood, and placed a hog of marble upon the gate of the city, on the side of Bethlehem. The emperor also published an edict, prohibiting the Jews from entering the city upon pain of death, and forbade them even to look at it from a distance. They were accustomed, it is said, to give great bribes to the Roman soldiers to be permitted to approach Ælia, and weep over the ruins of their country.

In this state, Jerusalem, now called Ælia by the Romans, continued till the reign of Constantine the Great, who, during his government, subverted pagan superstition, and established Christianity. He caused the city to assume its ancient name, enlarged and beautified it with many superb buildings and churches, and extended his munificence to every spot which had been consecrated by the footsteps of the Apostles and Prophets, and the Son of God. Helena, the mother of the emperor, went to Palestine, visited the sacred places, and erected the church of the Holy Sepulchre; so called, because supposed to be

raised over the tomb in which our Saviour was buried.

Constantine and the succeeding emperors, his sons, treated the Jews with great severity. But their successor, Julian, an apostate from Christianity, favoured their cause, and attempted to rebuild their temple, and induce them to settle in Jerusalem, in avowed contempt and defiance of the prophesies. But his undertaking was repeatedly frustrated.

Jerusalem remained in possession of the Greek emperors, till, in 613, it was taken by the Persians. But the Greek emperor Heraclius, soon recovered it, and banished the Jews; prohibiting them, under the severest penalties, from coming within three miles of the city.

The Arabian Caliph, Omar, invested and took Jerusalem in the year A. D. 636. He allowed the inhabitants the exercise of their religion, on condition of their paying tribute; but established the Mahometan mode of worship, and built a mosque where the temple had formerly stood. It is called, by the Mussulmen, El-Haram, or the Temple, and is by

far the most splendid edifice in Jerusalem. Its external magnificence appeared to Dr. Clarke superior to the celebrated mosque of St. Sophia, at Constantinople. The government became entirely Mahometan. The holy city was transferred from the Greek Christians to the Arabian Mussulmen, and continued in subjection to the Caliphs above four hundred years.

The Turks, a fierce and valiant nation, after having conquered Persia and other countries, turned their arms against the Holy Land, took Jerusalem in 1076, and established the Ottoman empire. The city of Jerusalem next fell into the hands of the Latin Christians. Peter the Hermit, a French monk, went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and there witnessed, and shared in, the oppressions the pilgrims endured from the Turkish government. After his return to Europe, he described the sufferings of the Christians in such pathetic terms, that, by the authority of Pope Urban the Second, and the council of Clermont, an expedition was formed to take Jerusalem from the Turks. Immense numbers, who were

called Crusaders, from their assuming the badge of the cross, engaged in what they styled the Holy War, for the recovery of Palestine from the hands of infidels. The conquest of the city, in the year 1099, appeared to have crowned their enterprize with success. Godfrey of Boulogne, their general, was chosen king, and the kingdom existed till the year 1187, when the Turkish Mussulmen regained their former dominion, and the Holy Land is still in their possession.

The emperor Adrian rebuilt Jerusalem, not exactly on its former site, but on the spot which it now occupies. He included Calvary within its walls. The gate of the Holy Sepulchre is strictly guarded by Turks without, and Greeks within. Admission, however, is granted to pilgrims of all nations and sects, upon paying a small tax. It is necessary to observe the difference between the church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the sepulchre itself; the first embracing all the apartments belonging to the different denominations of Christians; the latter, erected over the reputed tomb of our Saviour, at the foot of Calvary.

The tomb is situated in the centre of the church of the Holy Sepulchre, near to which may be heard the prayers of Christians in ancient Greek, or Latin, Armenian, Arabic, and Syriac.

LETTER VII.

Of the moral Discourses of our Saviour, and of the Allusions contained in them to the Opinions and Habits of the Jews.

My dear Nieces,

Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount contains the purest sentiments of religion and virtue which ever enlightened the world; and, considered in connexion with the opinions and habits of the Jewish nation, its excellence appears with peculiar lustre. It was admirably adapted to rectify their mistaken ideas respecting the Messiah's character; to reprove their vices, to purify their hearts, and to prepare them to acknowledge him, *whom to know aright is life eternal.*

Previously to our Saviour's delivery of this excellent discourse, he ascended a mountain, as probably no building could contain the multitudes who flocked around him. John the Baptist had already pointed him out as

the Messiah; and his stupendous miracles had persuaded many, that he was the mighty King, whom the prophets had foretold should reign in righteousness. Many of those who were assembled at this time, probably expected that this wonderful personage, whom they had seen perform astonishing miracles, would soon proclaim himself *the Messiah*, and establish a temporal kingdom.

Our Lord introduces his discourse with several short sentences, in which he pronounces a blessing upon those who possessed certain virtues and pious dispositions. "*Blessed* (says he) *are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" That is, those who are of an humble, teachable disposition. To be poor in spirit, may also mean to be free from an inordinate love and desire of riches; and patiently to bear a state of indigence, if it is allotted to us by Providence. It implies, too, that if we are rich, we should cheerfully resign our possessions, should Heaven require them of us. None destitute of this disposition could become the disciples of our Lord, and "leave all to follow

him." Therefore it is repeatedly required and recommended by our divine Instructer.

This temper of mind is the very reverse of that which actuated those of the Jewish nation, who, expecting that their Messiah would be a powerful temporal prince, entertained hopes of being elevated to posts of honour and opulence during his government. These notions were so deeply riveted, that the sons of Zebedee, even after they were the chosen disciples of our Lord, requested, "that one might sit on his right hand, and the other on his left, in his kingdom." But our Saviour reproved them for their ambitious views, by his own example, and strongly recommended the virtue of humility to the imitation of his followers.

With the possession of universal dominion, affluence, and honour, under their Messiah, the Jews expected that a scene of festivity and rejoicing would prevail, during his triumphant reign. But our Lord, knowing their extreme depravity as a nation, and foreseeing the miseries they were about to suffer, taught them a different lesson. "*Blessed* (says he)

are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." That is, in the midst of their afflictions, they shall find peculiar consolation in the enjoyment of the Messiah's spiritual reign; while those who have no higher objects in view, than the possession of power, riches, honour, and earthly pleasure, under a temporal prince, shall find their expectations blasted, and be involved in the ruin of their country. God, he assures them, will comfort those who mourn, for the sufferings they endure in his cause, and hereafter they will rejoice forever in the mansions of eternal felicity.

The Jews considered a military spirit as essential to their subduing the Romans, and acquiring a universal empire under the Messiah. But our Lord enjoins a spirit entirely opposite to this, both in its principles and effects. He pronounces a blessing upon "*the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*" Here our Saviour alludes to the words of David in the Psalms. "*Yet a little while and the wicked shall not be, but the meek shall inherit the earth.*" These words relate to a quiet possession of the land of Canaan. And

it is to be observed, that, after our Lord's death and resurrection, those Jews who rejected the Gospel, by their seditious and wicked behaviour, ruined themselves and their country; while those who had embraced the Christian religion, and were of a meek and peaceable disposition, retired from Jerusalem, as Christ had warned them to do, before the siege; and after the city was destroyed, returned, and dwelt there in tranquillity.

Our Saviour does not promise to the meek the possession of wealth, power, and worldly honours; nor indeed are these things their ordinary portion. But his meaning seems to be, that they shall enjoy mental composure; and that, by the providence of God, the necessaries of life, without contention, disquiet, or remorse, will usually be the blessing bestowed upon them. They will possess that calmness and resignation, under all the afflictions they are called to suffer, and that cheerful and grateful temper of mind in prosperous circumstances, which constitute the greatest blessings on earth.

Hunger and thirst, by a common figure of speech, are employed to express any ardent desire. The Jews were hungering and thirsting for an exemption from servitude to the Romans; and nothing could satiete their appetites but victory over their enemies. But our Lord pointed out a nobler object for their ambition. "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.*" That is, blessed are they who earnestly desire the highest moral and religious qualities, and the approbation of their Maker; for they shall be established in the enjoyment of divine love. This beatitude seems to be more fully explained in a subsequent part of this discourse. (See chap. vi. 33.) "*Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,*" that is, the righteousness which he required to be possessed by all who would become subjects of that spiritual kingdom which Christ came to establish, "*and all these things,*" says Jesus, "*shall be added unto you.*"

Mercy, or *compassion*, consists in a disposition to alleviate the miseries of mankind.

Amongst the Jews, it signified the pardon of injuries, and alms-giving; but they confined their charity to those of their own nation. In opposition to this narrowness of mind, our Lord declares, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*" He also reproves their unsocial selfishness, under the parable of the good Samaritan; and enjoins his followers to "*be merciful, even as their heavenly Father is merciful.*"

The Jewish teachers maintained, that impure thoughts and desires were not sinful, unless they produced evil actions. In opposition to this opinion, our divine Teacher declares, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*" On other occasions he frequently reproved the Pharisees for exhibiting a fair external appearance, while destitute of internal purity. He compares them to whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but within are full of dead men's bones, and all manner of uncleanness. This comparison of our Lord appears peculiarly happy, when we recollect, that it was the custom of the Eastern nations to whitewash

their sepulchres; and we may suppose that, at this time, the sepulchres about Jerusalem were newly white-washed, as the Passover was at hand. With a particular allusion to the hypocrisy of the scribes and pharisees, our Saviour pronounces a blessing upon the pure in heart; and teaches us, that no external actions, however plausible to men, who can judge only from appearances, can avail us before the omniscient Deity, the *Searcher of hearts.*

In order to exhibit the entire contrariety between the spirit of Christianity and a revengeful temper, and that desire of conquest which excite mankind to engage in destructive wars, our Lord pronounced a blessing upon *peace-makers*, "*for they*," said he "*shall be called the children of God.*" They beat the image, and copy the example, of their heavenly Father, who is styled "*the God of peace.*" The glorious title of *children of God* shall not be bestowed upon those who distinguish themselves under the banner of a victorious leader, but upon those who love peace themselves, and study to promote it in others.

Our divine Instructer next pronounced a blessing upon those who are "*persecuted for righteousnes' sake.*" Thus he taught the Jews, that instead of obtaining a conquering Messiah, and having their ambition gratified by wealth and honour, an adherence to his cause would expose his followers to violent persecutions. Those, however, who suffer for the gospel should esteem themselves happy in enduring affliction, for they shall be rewarded with eternal felicity in heaven.

After our Lord had described to his hearers the dispositions which would prepare them for becoming subjects of the Messiah's kingdom, he proceeds to awaken the attention, particularly of his disciples, to the responsibleness and importance of their situation, "*Ye are,*" says he "*the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted; it is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.*" Our Saviour's supposition of the salt having lost its savour, is thus illustrated by Mr. Maundrell, who informs us, that, "in the valley of salt, near Gebal, and about four miles

from Aleppo, there is a small precipice, occasioned by the continual taking away of the salt. "In this," says he, "I broke a small piece of it, which, though the part that was exposed to the rain, sun, and air, had the sparks and particles of salt, yet it had perfectly lost its savour. The innermost, which had been connected to the rock, retained its savour, as I found by proof."

"*Ye are*," says our divine Instructer to his disciples, "*the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*" The above named author tells us, that "there is a city, called Japhet, supposed to be the ancient Bethulia, which, standing on an high hill, might easily be seen from the mountain on which Christ delivered this discourse, to which he here probably alluded.

When our Lord calls his disciples *the light of the world*, he exhorts them, to "*let their light so shine before men, that they, seeing their good works, may glorify their Father who is in heaven.*" The meaning of our divine Teacher appears to be, that as God makes use of the sun to enlighten the natural

world, in like manner the disciples are employed to dispel the moral darkness of mankind by communicating to them the knowledge of God, and exhorting them to the practice of the Christian virtues.

LETTER VIII.

The Subject continued.

My dear Nieces,

At the time when our Lord delivered his admirable discourse on the mount, various opinions prevailed in the world, respecting the changes that would take place during the government of the Messiah. Some were inclined to believe that he would set aside the ancient religion, and introduce a new one in its place. It appears that the Jewish teachers made an important distinction between the greater and lesser precepts of their law. But our Saviour assures them, that he was not "*come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them;*" and that, "*till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*"

To an audience which had been accustomed to admire the piety of their pharisaical teachers, our Lord declares, "*that except*

your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." That is, except ye, my hearers, interpret and observe the moral law in a more perfect manner than the scribes and pharisees, ye shall have no share in the kingdom of the Messiah. Our Saviour's declaration must have greatly surprised his hearers, if the proverb, which has since prevailed, was of so ancient a date; for it has been commonly said by the Jews, "that if but two men were to enter into the kingdom of God, one of them would be a scribe and the other a Pharisee."

Our Lord proceeds to mention several instances of the low standard of the rule of righteousness, which the scribes and pharisees taught and practised; and shews, that their interpretation of various particulars in the moral law was grossly defective and corrupt. The first thing which he notices is, their sentiments on the sixth commandment, which prohibits murder. This crime the Jewish teachers confined entirely to the outward action of maliciously slaying a person, by a

man's own hand; and supposed, that he who was not guilty in this respect could not have offended against the divine law. But Christ exhibited the true spirit and intent of the commandment, and declared, that he who indulges himself in unreasonable anger, and reviling language, transgresses this law. The different degrees of punishment made use of by the Jewish nation, are supposed to be referred to by our Saviour in the twenty-second verse of the chapter.

The *Judgment* appears to stand for the lowest court of justice among the Jews, consisting of twenty-three persons, and belonging to every considerable city or town in Judea. They had the power of inflicting punishment upon criminals, who were to be either strangled or beheaded.

The *Council* refers to a higher court, usually called the Sanhedrim, which consisted of seventy two persons, the members of which were called elders. Before this court, crimes of a more atrocious nature were brought; and the criminal, when convicted, was sentenced to be stoned to death.

The last and highest degree of punishment named, is *hell fire.* This last punishment corresponds to the burning in the *Valley of Hinnon,* a spot formerly polluted by parents who sacrificed their children to the idol Moloch. The place, consecrated to this cruel and abominable rite, was called *Tophet;* and the spot in which it was situated, *the valley of the son of Hinnon,* or *Gehenna.* In the same spot, the Jews, in after times, kept continual fires, to burn the dead carcasses which were carried thither out of the city of Jerusalem, in order to pollute it, and to prevent it from being applied to the same wicked purpose as before. To be burnt with the fire of Gehenna, came hence to be used as a proverbial expression, for the most dreadful terments, and, in process of time, for the punishment of the wicked in another life.

Our Lord proceeds, and enjoins on his audience, "*that should they bring their gift to the altar, and there remember, that a brother has aught against them, to leave their gift before the altar, and first be reconciled to their brethren.*" That is, when we have injured any person, speedily to repent of our sin; and suffer no employment, not even the offering of a vol-

untary gift upon the altar, to deter us from seeking an immediate reconciliation. Christ here teaches us also, that the duty of benevolence is to be preferred to ritual observance; since the one is to be neglected till the other be performed. The scribes and pharisees taught, on the contrary, that gifts, brought to the altar, would expiate all offences, which the judges did not punish, and that even without reformation.

We find our Lord, in this discourse, decidedly forbids the rash and profane oaths, which the Jews were in the habit of using upon every trivial occasion. As by their law, they were directed to swear by the name of God, (Deut. vi. 13.) they supposed themselves bound to perform vows, or oaths, made in the name of God. But to keep in their power, as they thought, the performance of their promissory oaths and vows, they chose to swear not by the name of Jehovah, but by heaven, by the earth, by their heads, by the temple, by the altar, the gold of the temple, &c. and because the name of God was not mentioned in these oaths, the Jews considered them as imposing but small, if any obligation. But we find our Saviour condemns these acts of

deception, and shews, that in all these forms of swearing, there is a secret reference to God.

The meaning of our Lord in Matt. xxviii. and the following verses, appears to be, that, though Moses allowed, as a judicial regulation, the exacting of an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, (Levit. xxiv. 17–23.) and though the pharisees inculcated this law as a means of private revenge, yet that he did not allow his followers to resist evil, or an injurious man, either by violent opposition, or litigous law-suits. "*Whoever*," says our Lord, "*shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.*" These words refer to the practice of governors in the East, who compelled persons to accompany and assist them in any public business.

The scribes and pharisees restricted the great law of loving our neighbour, to their relations, friends, or persons of their own nation. It was a precept among them, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thy enemy.*" The latter part of this sentence is not found in the law of Moses, but probably was received by the Jewish teachers long before the Chris-

tian era. The Mosaical law inculcates kindness to strangers, and enforces the duty of treating them with humanity by powerful considerations. Our Lord enforces yet higher benevolence. His sacred injunction is, "*Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.*" This precept of our Lord may well be called a *new commandment;* as it was not found in any moral code, till our Saviour gave it a place in his; and it constitutes one of the many proofs of the originality of his character and religion.

The *Publicans* were *collectors of the duties and customs* which the Romans imposed upon the Jewish nation; and this people, from principles of conscience and patriotism, deemed it criminal for their countrymen to follow this employment. In general, they were men of immoral character, and frequently increased the hatred of the public, by exacting more than their due, and enforcing their demands by military punishment. The Jews, in the time of our Lord, would not address the

usual compliment of *Peace be with you*, to either heathens or publicans; and the latter would use it to those only who followed the same employment, but not to heathens. Our Saviour enjoins his followers to lay aside this morose and bigoted temper, and to cherish a benevolent disposition towards all around them. "*If*," says he, "*ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others; do not even the publicans so?*" If your affection is limited to your friends, you do no more than that which is practised by those, whom you esteem to be among the worst of men.

Our divine Instructer, after exhorting his hearers not to imbibe the morose prejudices of the Jews, exhibits the Deity as a pattern for our imitation; "*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" The image, which perpetually occurs throughout the Gospels, and under which our Lord delights to mention God, is that of *our heavenly Father*, who "*maketh his sun to shine on the evil, and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the just, and on the unjust,*" and "*is kind to all, even to the evil and unthankful.*"

LETTER IX.

The Subject continued.

My dear Nieces,

I will proceed to point out other allusions to Jewish opinions and habits, in our Saviour's sublime discourse on the mount.

Our Lord continues his divine instructions, by rebuking the ostentation of the Jews, particularly that of the Scribes and Pharisees, in the performance of religious duties; "*Take heed,*" says he, "*that you do no not your alms before men to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.*" See also the three following verses. That is, if we propose our own selfish ends in this world by our good actions, we have acquired the object of our solicitude, and have no reason to expect a reward in the kingdom of heaven. By hypocrites, our Saviour intends the Scribes and Pharisees; and by their sounding a trumpet before them, he

represents the vainglorious manner, in which they distributed their gifts. Chardin, a famous voyager, relates, that in the East, the dervises, when they receive presents, blow trumpets in honour of the donor. It may be inferred from Matthew vi. 2, that the poor Jews, who begged alms, used the same practice; and that the hypocritical Pharisees might confine their charity to those, who would pay them this honour. Those who perform charitable actions in places of public resort, to be seen of men, are sufficiently gratified by the applauses of the spectators. Our Lord also reproves the Jews for similar ostentation in their prayers. "*And when thou prayest thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.*" In opposition to a display of devotion, our Saviour directed them to enter into their closet, and pray to their Father in secret, and assured them that he, who seeth in secret, would reward them openly. The custom of praying in the corners of the streets,

was probably common in our Saviour's time, among those who wished to attract public notice by their superiour sanctity; but ostentation in prayer has not been confined to that period, or that nation, but may be traced in various others. Mahometans perform their acts of worship in the most public manner. According to the accounts of travellers, "such Turks as are so employed, that they cannot conveniently attend the mosques, in whatever business they are engaged, pray immediately, when the hour warns them, in whatever place they are situated.

In opposition to Pagans and Jews, who thought "they should be heard for their much speaking," our Lord condemns *vain repetition in prayer*. The idolatrous worshippers of Baal called on the name of their God from morning till evening, saying, "O Baal, hear us!" Thus, also, the worshippers of Diana, all with one voice, for the space of two hours, cried out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" The Jewish rabbias have laid down the following maxims: "Every one who multiplies prayer shall be heard." "The prayer which

is long, shall not return empty." It is said that the Pharisees, in compliance with these precepts, would make prayers three hours long. Our Saviour reproves them for their long and hypocritical prayers. "*Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence, make long prayers, therefore you shall receive the greater condemnation.*" Our divine Teacher likewise condemns those unmeaning tautologies, which are so foreign from the true spirit of devotion. In the form of prayer, which he gave his disciples, there is no vain parade, prolixity, or importunate repetition. It is concise, perspicuous, and comprehensive; and fitted for all classes of men. It fixes our thoughts on a few important points, adapted to impress the mind with a deep sense of our own duties and interests, and of the designs and goodness of our heavenly Father, to whom it is addressed.

The importance of *prayer* appears from our Saviour's commands on this subject; from his promises to those who pray in sincerity; from his directions what we ought to ask for;

and from what he has taught us, that we may reasonably expect to receive in return for our prayers. They are the means which God has appointed, for producing and strengthening devout affections towards himself, and benevolence towards our brethren; and in this way, of fitting us for the performance of our duty, both towards our Maker and our fellow creatures.

Our Lord next reprehends *fasting*, when it is to be ascribed to the desire of acquiring the reputation of superiour sanctity. "*Moreover*," said he, "*when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast*," &c. A *sad countenance* here signifies that austere, mortified look, which devotees affect, who place piety in outward show, rather than in true goodness. The Pharisee boasted that "he *fasted twice in the week*;" that is, on Monday and Thursday. On Thursday, in memory of Moses going up Mount Sinai on that day; and on Monday, in memory of his coming down from thence. It is said that some of the Pharisees fasted

four days in the week, and slept upon the ground, and even strewed thorns under them, in order to excite greater uneasiness. The Jews began their fasts on the evening, after sunset, and remained without eating, till the same hour the next day; or, till the rising of the stars. On the great day of expiation, they continue without food for twenty-eight hours. The Eastern people, generally, consider fasting as consisting not only in an abstinence from food, but from bathing, perfumes, and anointing; in short, a total abstinence from pleasure of every kind.

In opposition to this ostentatious display of superiour sanctity in our religious duties, our divine Instructer gave the following directions: "*But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face,*" &c. As the Jews ordinarily anointed their heads, except on days of mourning, the meaning of our Saviour seems to be, that we should appear with the same countenances and habits on days of fasting, as at other times. The reason of our Lord's injunction is thus given by himself; "*That thou appear not unto men to fast, but*

unto thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" It appears that fasting is only approved by our Saviour, when it is performed with a view to promote pious dispositions in the mind, and not to obtain praise from men.

LETTER X.

The Subject continued.

My dear Nieces,

Our blessed Lord continues his discourse, by inculcating *heavenly-mindedness*, and the practice of virtues, to which the Jewish teachers were generally strangers. He warns his hearers against covetousness; and reprehends, in particular, the practice of the Pharisees, who were very avaricious, and very much devoted to the world. They resorted to any measures, just or unjust, to obtain riches. Our Saviour exhorted his hearers not to "*lay up treasures on earth, where moth and rust do corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.*" In the Eastern countries, where the fashion of clothes did not alter, as with us, the treasures of the rich consisted not only of gold and silver, but of costly habits, and finely wrought vessels, liable to be destroyed in the manner here

mentioned. Our divine Instructer assured his hearers, that, should their treasure be on earth, there would their hearts be also. "*Ye cannot,*" says he, "*serve two masters; ye cannot serve God and Mammon.*" *Mammon* was a Syrian word, signifying *riches*, which are here represented under the figure of a person who has been deified, or rather been raised to universal dominion by the folly of mankind.

Our Lord proceeds to caution his hearers against extreme anxiety respecting our earthly subsistence, and gives a striking exhortation to trust in the providential care of our heavenly Father. It added a peculiar force to our Saviour's words, that they were delivered in view of the surrounding beauties of nature. He could point to the fowls of the air, and the flowers of the field, and show his auditors, that the whole creation attested the truth of his instructions. "*Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feedeth them; are ye not much better than they?*" The ravens, in particular, are mentioned in Luke's gospel, and our Lord,

in directing his disciples to trust in God for their subsistence bids them consider the ravens. It may appear to some surprising, that so abject a creature should be so frequently recognised in Scripture, as an object of care to the Maker and Preserver of all things. When the Most High challenged Job out of the whirlwind, he demanded, "*Who provideth for the raven his food? When his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat.*" The Psalmist uses it as an argument for praising God. "*The Lord giveth food to the young ravens which cry.*" The ravens are sometimes driven rather prematurely from their nest, before they are all able to subsist by their own industry. In this case, pinched with hunger, and abandoned by their parents, they fill the air with their cries; as it were complaining to God concerning their destitute and helpless condition. Nor do they cry in vain, the Almighty Benefactor supplies all their wants. But the care of Providence is not confined to the young. It extends also to their parents, (who "neither sow nor reap, have neither storehouse nor barn,") and pro-

vides food for them from his inexhaustible stores. Even the meanness of the character of this bird may serve the more strongly, in a considerate mind, to excite and establish a firm reliance on the wise and bountiful arrangements of Providence. The argument of our Lord is exceedingly strong and pointed. If the Almighty hear not in vain the croaking of a young raven, he surely will not turn a deaf ear to the supplications of his people.

Our divine Instructer again turns our attention to the beauties of nature, to demonstrate the providential care of our heavenly Father. "*Consider,*" says he, "*the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.*" "It is," says Sir J. E. Smith, "natural to presume that our Saviour, according to his usual custom, called the attention of his hearers to some object at hand; and as the fields of the Levant were overrun with the Amaryllis Lutea, whose golden liliaceous flowers, in autumn, afford one of the most brilliant and gorgeous objects in nature,

the expression of, *Solomon in all his glory, arrayed like one of these*, is peculiarly appropriate." A description of probably the same species of flower is given by Mr. Salt, in his voyage to Abyssinia. "At a few miles from Adowa," says he, "we discovered a new and beautiful species of Amaryllis, which bore from ten to twelve spikes of bloom on each stem, springing from the common receptacle. The general colour of the corolla was white, and every petal was marked with a single streak of bright purple in the middle. The flower was sweet scented; and its smell, though much more powerful, resembled the lily of the valley."

Our Saviour's words, "*Consider the lilies*," &c. acquire additional force and beauty, when we call to mind, that they were suggested by the sight of the splendid species of Lily, which abounds in Palestine. We may imagine our Lord, when delivering his divine Sermon on the Mount, pointing to those superb flowers, which decked the surrounding plain, and deducing from their beauty lessons of contentment, and reliance on the bounty of our heavenly Father.

A survey of the beauty and variety of the plants and flowers in the vegetable kingdom, ought ever to inspire admiration and gratitude to our heavenly Father, and confidence in his goodness. This lesson is taught us by our Saviour. "*Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*" The dried stalks of herbs and flowers are used in the East for fuel, wood being very scarce. The meaning of our Lord appears to be, if God bestow such exquisite beauty upon things, of no further value, than to give a transient pleasure to the eye, and afterwards serve for the meanest uses, how much more will he take care of his rational and immortal creatures.

Our Lord, after enjoining us to take no thought for food and raiment, explains his meaning by the following direction. "*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*" These words point our attention to objects of infinitely greater importance, and

prohibit the excessive anxiety about earthly things, which excludes that supreme regard to religion, which ought to occupy the first place in our thoughts and affections.

LETTER XI.

The Subject concluded.

My dear Nieces,

Our Lord, in his admirable sermon on the mount, strongly prohibits censoriousness and self-conceit. He probably alluded to a distinguished trait in the character of the scribes and pharisees, who valued themselves on their descent from Abraham; looked down upon other nations; and censured with asperity and bitterness those who were not of their own sect or party. "*Judge not*," says our divine Teacher, "*that ye be not judged.*" "*And, why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or, how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?*" This expression was proverbial among the Hebrews. The following passages are taken from the sayings of the

Rabbis. "How sayest thou, cast the fragment of a mote out of thine eye, while a beam of wood is in thine own?" Another Talmudical author professes his wonder, "that any one should suffer himself to be rebuked, when, if any should say, Cast the mote out of thine eyes, it might be retorted, Pluck thou the beam first out of thine own eyes." The design of our divine Teacher, in adopting the proverbs of the Rabbis, was, to heighten the severity of his reproof, and to show that the vices, which those hypocrites censured in others with such asperity, were, though very reprehensible, as inferior to the crimes in which they securely indulged, as a small splinter of wood, or particle of dust, is inferior to a beam. The import of the expression used by our Saviour is this. Why are you so sharp sighted in discerning trifling faults in others, while you have great errors of conduct to correct in yourselves?

Our Lord next cautions his followers against attempting to instruct those who despise and ridicule religion, who are obstinately bent upon evil, and hardened against reproof.

"*Give not,*" says our Saviour, "*that which is holy to dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*" Dogs were held in detestation by the Jews. By this animal, our Saviour intends men of odious character and violent temper. St. Paul names the opposers of the Gospel by this appellation. "Beware of dogs." (See Phil. iii. 2.) By pearls, religious instruction is to be understood; and these gems are a fit emblem of any thing of uncommon excellence. The disposition ascribed to the hog, in this proverbial saying of our divine Instructer, corresponds with the natural character of these animals. They are obstinate and untractable. By the Mosaic law they were ranked among the *unclean* animals, the use of which was forbidden to the Jews.

As our Lord had, in his admirable discourse, enjoined many important and arduous duties, he exhorts his auditors to implore divine assistance, to enable them to perform them. "*Ask,*" saith he, "*and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find;*

knock, and it shall be opened to you." "*Asking*, *seeking*, and *knocking*, are different words to express the fervor of our devotion. This earnestness implies the existence of those good dispositions, which Christ has previously enjoined; such as freedom from worldly mindedness, confidence in God, and charity towards mankind.

"*Enter ye in,*" saith our Saviour, "*at the strait gate.*" At the banquets of the ancients, the gate, on the coming of the guests, was made narrow, the wicket only being left open, and the porter standing to prevent the unbidden from rushing in. Those who were admitted had to go along a narrow passage to the room. When the guests had arrived, the door was shut, not to be opened to those who stood and knocked without. This is represented in the parable of the ten virgins, Matt. xxv. 2. Christ, by whom we enter into the marriage feast, compares himself to a gate. John x. 12, &c.

A false teacher is often compared to *the wolf*, in the sacred scriptures; and without straining the metaphor several points of re-

semblance may be perceived. "*Beware,*" said our Lord to the multitudes, "*beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing,*" gentle, unassuming, and harmless in their demeanour and profession, as that inoffensive animal; "*but inwardly they are ravening wolves;*" in their temper and secret purposes, deceitful, cruel, and rapacious; under the covert of moderation and piety, lying in wait to deceive the unwary soul. Such were the men, concerning whom the apostle warned the elders of the church of Ephesus: "For I know this, that after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." The Hebrew nation used to call those, who took upon themselves the instruction of the people, especially if they pretended to be divinely commissioned, *prophets;* not confining this name to those who predicted future events. The *false prophets* or *teachers* here spoken of, were either scribes and pharisees, who exerted all their influence to dissuade the people from believing in Christ; or Christian preachers, who professed themselves the followers of our Lord, but corrupt-

ed the genuine doctrines of his religion, from worldly motives. In order to guard against the deceptive arts of false teachers, our Lord directs us to examine their conduct. "*Ye may*," said he, "*know them by their fruits*," that is, by the general tenor of their moral conduct.

Our Lord makes the following striking comparison. "*Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock.*"

The state of things in Judea, as described by travellers in that country, will illustrate the meaning of the comparison which our Lord here uses. The land of Canaan is described as an exceedingly hilly and rocky country; but the rocks are frequently covered with a thin coat of earth or sand. During the rainy season, the water pours down in great violence sometimes for three or four days and nights together, so as to produce great torrents in

every part of the country. These violent rains, in a mountainous land, must occasion inundations, endangering buildings which happen to be placed within their reach, by washing away the soil under them, and occasioning their fall. To accidents of this kind our Saviour alludes, in his description of the ruin of a house built upon *the sand.* He shews the striking contrast between the foolish man's building on the sand, or loose soil, and the wise man's digging down to the rock, before he laid the foundation of his building.

"*And it came to pass,*" says the Evangelist, "*when Jesus had finished these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrines, for he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*"

Our Lord spoke with an authority which excited the astonishment of the people, because he delivered not the variable and contradictory opinions of men; but taught the doctrines which his heavenly Father commanded him to reveal. He also taught as "one having authority," because he enforced his doctrines by the highest sanction; that is, the sanction of a future state. Other teach-

of morality recommended virtue, because it generally brings with it its own reward of honour, success, and happiness. These motives, however, which, in circumstances the most favourable, are unable to withstand the strength of human passion, or the temptations to vice, must have been still less effectual in the circumstances of our Saviour's disciples, for he taught his followers to take up their cross and follow him, and to imitate him in a course of self-denying virtue.

Lastly, Jesus did not teach as the scribes, because the Jewish Rabbis contented themselves with discoursing about *ceremonies* and *traditions;* but he drew their attention from those trivial and contemptible things, to lead them to the greatest and noblest objects.

I will conclude my remarks on our Lord's sermon on the mount, with desiring you, my dear nieces, not merely to peruse it, but to commit it to memory; and let its precepts sink deep into your hearts. Dr. Jortin, a learned divine, observes, "If there be any part of the New Testament which deserves a more serious consideration than the rest, it must needs be our Saviour's discourse upon

the mount, recorded in St. Matthew's Gospel, which contains the sum and substance of the Christian religion. In it our Lord explains morality, condemns several Jewish opinions, commands some things which the law of Moses did not require, and forbids some things which it permitted. He enables us to resolve a question which exercised, embarrassed, and divided the wise and learned of the ages which preceded the Gospel, viz. What is the chief good of man, and, consequently, what is the great end which man should always have in view? The chief good of man, as it may easily be collected from this discourse of our Lord, is *eternal happiness in the life to come, and, in this present life, peace of mind and the advantages flowing from it.* Whatsoever, therefore, tends to this, is good; what may deprive us of it is evil. To make his hearers more attentive, Christ begins his discourses with some short and remarkable sentences, in commendation of certain neglected virtues; sentences which may be called Christian paradoxes, in which he declares those persons most happy, who, according to the estimation of the world, are most miserable."

LETTER XII.

Of the Miracle performed by our Lord, in healing the Centurion's Servant.

My dear Nieces,

Having, in my preceding letters, made some remarks on our Lord's admirable sermon on the mount, I will now direct your attention to the miracle he performed on the centurion's servant, recorded in Matthew viii. and Luke vii.

Judea, being a conquered province, had Roman soldiers stationed in it, who were appointed to keep the people in subjection. Among these soldiers, a centurion, or captain of an hundred men, having heard the fame of our Saviour's miracles, was desirous of procuring his assistance in behalf of a favorite servant, sick of the palsy. To obtain his healing aid, he sent to him some of the elders of the Jews, beseeching him by them, that he would come and heal his servant. They ear-

nestly enforced the centurion's request, saying, "he was worthy for whom he should do this; for he loveth our nation, and has built us a synagogue."

Then Jesus went with them, and when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent other friends to him, saying by them, "Lord, trouble not thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof. Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee; but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed."

The miracles of our Lord appear to have been the subject of popular conversation and belief; and the manner in which he performed them seems to have been spoken of by those who had witnessed them, as evidence that he possessed an uncontrolled authority over the laws of nature; so that he appeared like an absolute sovereign giving his commands, while all diseases, and even the elements, obeyed him with the instant submission of menial dependents. The centurion had doubtless heard that, by the command of Christ, given at a distance, the son of a noble-

man at Capernaum was restored to health; and he doubted not that he had power to produce, in the same way, a similar effect upon his servant. Hence he confidently expresses his belief, that Jesus exercised the same power over the maladies of men, which he himself did over the soldiers under his command: "*For*," says he, "*even I, who am a man under authority, have soldiers under myself; and I say to one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.*"

A late writer observes, that "our Lord appears to have had, from the beginning, a perfect knowledge of the great events which in after times should befal him; and his death, his resurrection, the rejection of the Jews, and the converson of the gentiles, were so frequent in his mind, so familiar to his thoughts, that the slightest circumstance, calculated to revive the idea of them, instantly brought them to his recollection. Here we meet with a remarkable instance of this fact.

"A heathen, in terms the most decisive, expressing his faith in him, while Israel, to

whom he came as his own, to whom he offered salvation as their expected Saviour, rejected and persecuted him, directs his attention to the time when *multitudes* among the heathen would embrace him; while his countrymen, by their obstinacy and guilt, would be deprived of their high hopes and privileges; and in the midst of the subject, he introduces a prophecy respecting it."

Our Lord not only admitted the centurion's request, but honored him with his unerring and distinguished approbation. "When Jesus heard it he marvelled, and said to them that followed, '*Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*'"

The kingdom of heaven is represented in this and other texts of scripture, under the figure of a sumptuous entertainment, where the guests sit down with the master of the

feast. These entertainments were usually made at night, and continued to a late hour. The place for the reception of the guests was illuminated in a splendid manner; while those who were denied entrance, were in outer darkness, or the darkness without, where they not only suffered disgrace, but were exposed to cold and hunger. Therefore it is said, "*there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" The prediction of our Lord displays a striking contrast to the opinions of the Jews, who used to say, that "all Israel shall have a part in the world to come, but the heathen shall be fuel for hell-fire."

Our Lord, after applauding the centurion's faith, grants his request; and the persons who had been deputed to address him on this subject found, to their great astonishment, that the servant was restored to perfect health.

The interesting history of the Roman centurion affords a striking instance of our Saviour's divine power, which enabled him to restore the sick servant to health, by only speaking a word at a distance, and without so much as seeing him.

This narrative also exhibits, in the character of the centurion, an illustrious example of eminent *Christian virtues*. He gave proof of his *humanity*, in the solicitude he evinced for the recovery of his servant's health. And this is the more remarkable, and honourable to the centurion, because the Roman servants experienced very different treatment from their masters. These servants were almost all of them slaves, and were too commonly used with extreme rigour and cruelty. They were often constrained to labor beyond their strength, confined in loathsome dungeons, loaded with chains, and tortured; they were often deserted in sickness and old age, and put to death for trivial faults and slight suspicions. Such conduct forms a striking contrast to the kindness and compassion of the good centurion.

The *piety* and *generosity* of the centurion were also displayed in his conduct toward the Jews, in building a synagogue for them at his own expense. Their country was a Roman province; and those who are acquainted with the Roman history know well, with what cru-

elty, rapacity, and oppression, the governors and commanding officers, in the conquered provinces, generally behaved towards the people whom they were sent to keep in awe. In the midst of this insolence of office, the centurion patronised a distressed and injured people; and it is as honourable to his memory as it is singular, and almost unexampled, in his circumstances, that he should "*love the Jewish nation and build them a synagogue.*"

The centurion evinced his *humility*, in the manner in which he solicited our Saviour for the cure of his servant. He repeatedly sent messengers to our Lord, thinking himself unworthy to address him in his own person. This lowliness of mind is the more remarkable, because humility, in the gospel sense of the word, is a virtue with which the ancients, and more particularly the Romans, were totally unacquainted. Every thing that we call *meek* and *humble*, they considered as mean and contemptible. A haughty, imperious, and overbearing temper, a high opinion of their own virtue and wisdom, a contempt of all nations but their own, a quick sense and keen

resentment, not only of injuries, but even of the slightest affronts, formed the favorite and predominant character of the Romans. Hence they considered humility as the mark of a tame and abject mind. When, therefore, we see this good centurion, differing so widely from his countrymen in this respect, we may conclude, that his notions of morality were conformed to a much higher standard than theirs; and that his disposition peculiarly fitted him for the reception of the Gospel.

The most remarkable part of the centurion's character, more particularly noticed by our Lord, is his *faith*. Our Saviour bestowed this high encomium upon the centurion, because he believed in our Lord's power to work miracles; and because he, who had been educated as a heathen did, notwithstanding, submit himself to sufficient evidence. He had heard of Jesus, of his unblemished life, his heavenly doctrine, his numerous and astonishing miracles; and had heard them confirmed by such testimony, as no ingenuous mind could resist. He immediately surrenders his belief to such convincing evidence of our Lord's divine power.

LETTER XIII.

Of our Lord's reproving the Pharisees for their Violation of the divine Law; and of the Pharisees and Sadducees' requiring a Sign from Heaven.

My dear Nieces,

As I wish to give you some idea of the meaning of the passages in our Lord's discourses, which allude to the opinions of the Jews during his abode on earth, I will now call your attention to the following passages of scripture.

It appears from Matt. xv. 5. that the reports of Christ's miracles gave great uneasiness to the scribes and pharisees of Jerusalem; and some of them had sought him in order to watch his conduct, and to obtain matter of accusation against him. But finding, that neither he nor his disciples neglected any part of the Mosaic law, they objected to him his disciples' disregard to the traditions of the elders,

in neglecting to wash their hands when they ate bread. Our Saviour replies to their censures on that subject, by charging them with their violations of the divine law by their traditions: "*For*," said he, "*God commanded, saying, honour thy father and mother, and he that curseth father or mother let him die the death.*" Our Lord, by quoting both the commandment, and the denunciation against the opposite crime, has shown, that the pharisees not only allowed the omission, but, in certain cases, prohibited the observance of the duty. According to their doctrine, if a man should say to his distressed father or mother, "I give or devote to the altar, whatsoever of mine might be appropriated to thy relief," he shall not afterwards be obliged to honor or relieve his parents, by giving to them any part of his property. *Corban* signifies any sacred offering, whether it consisted of a sacrifice or gift in money.

It was a custom among the Jews solemnly to devote to God, that is, to the use of the public treasury in the temple, what they might otherwise have given to their relations and

friends, meaning, by this practice of binding themselves by a vow, to put it out of their power to assist their parents. It was frequent, also, for the Jews to leave whole estates to the treasury, and thus deprive their descendants of any share in their property. This usage was encouraged by the pharisees, because the priests, who were chiefly of this sect, abundantly shared in the gifts devoted to the altar. They had so much influence over the people, that it became a common practice with the latter not to give any thing to their parents, under pretence that they had devoted their property to religious uses.

The Mishna, which contains a code of the Jewish civil and canon law, gives an account of a Jew who had, by a vow, excluded his father from being benefitted by his property. Afterwards, upon the marriage of his son, he wished to have his father present at the nuptials. In this dilemma, what was to be done? He surrendered the court where the entertainment was to be made, and the feast itself, to a neighbour, on condition that he would invite the old gentleman to the wedding.

As an instance of Pharisaical strictness in observing their traditions, we are told, upon the authority of the Jewish Talmud, that when Rabbi Akiba was confined in prison, with only a small allowance of water, he chose rather to die of thirst, than omit the custom of washing his hands.

The Jews had seen our Saviour perform many of the most benificent miracles; such as healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, making the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and multiplying a few loaves and fishes into provisions for many thousands. But notwithstanding these amazing acts of divine power, blended with benevolence, the pharisees and sadducees, who hated each other on account of the difference in their religious opinions, united in desiring Christ to show them a sign from heaven. The sign they requested to see was, perhaps, similar to what the prophets exhibited; Moses brought down hail and lightning upon the Egyptians; Samuel caused thunder and hail, and Elijah called down fire from heaven.

The Jews might pretend, that there was room for artifice and illusion in those miracles which were performed upon earth ; but that the art of man could not reach the heavens. The pharisees strongly evinced their arrogance in cherishing the idea, that the Deity would afford miraculous signs whenever they might call for them. Our Saviour refused to gratify their presumption, and declared, "*An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign ; and there shall no sign be given it but the sign of the prophet Jonah.*" This sign was, his own resurrection on the third day; which, as predicted and accomplished, to the disappointment and confusion of his powerful enemies, and as connected with its extensive and permanent effects, was vastly more conclusive than any transient sign from heaven could have been.

LETTER XIV.

On our Lord's Directions to his Disciples when he sent them to preach and to perform Miracles.

My dear Nieces,

There are, in the tenth chapter of Matthew, which contains the commission of our Lord to his disciples, whom he sent to preach and to perform miracles, several allusions to Jewish opinions, and to natural history. These allusions I will endeavour to point out.

The belief of the Jewish nation, that their Messiah would appear to deliver them from subjection to the Romans, and establish a temporal kingdom, was deeply rooted in their minds. But the kingdom of Christ was not of this world. He chose for his immediate companions and apostles, twelve persons, natives of Galilee, a part of the Holy Land despised by the Jews in general. They were chosen out of the lowest stations, were either

publicans or fishermen, or in some of the obscurer occupations of life. They were not versed in the literature of the age in which they lived, nor acquainted with the arts of popular address. Such associates were ill suited to promote the views of a prince or conqueror, and perhaps our Saviour could not have opposed, more clearly, the erroneous opinion which was generally entertained respecting the Messiah, than by the choice of such men.

Our Lord directs his disciples, when they should enter on their apostolic mission, to give the salutation customary in the east, of "*Peace be unto you,*" to the houses into which they went, and he adds, "*Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of the house, or city, shake off the dust of your feet.*" The Jews supposed that there was such a peculiar holiness, in the land of Israel, that, when they came from a heathen country, they stopped at its borders, and wiped the dust from their feet, that the sacred inheritance might not be polluted with it, nor would they permit herbs to be brought

to them from the neighbouring countries, lest they should bring any of the dust of their land with them. Hence, this action was a lively intimation, that when the Jews had rejected the Gospel, they were no longer to be regarded as the people of God, but were on a level with the heathens.

When our Lord had given his apostles general directions respecting their conduct, he proceeds to point out the peculiar difficulties and trials to which they, in the execution of their office, would be exposed. "*Behold,*" said he, "*I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*" Subtlety, circumspection, and prudence, have been regarded as characteristics of the serpent: for to be as sharp-sighted as a serpent, was a proverb both among the Greeks and Romans. On the contrary, gentleness, simplicity, and timidity, are thought to belong to the dove. The wisdom of the serpent degenerates into cunning, and the simplicity of the dove into weakness or folly, when existing single. But united, the one corrects the excess, and supplies

the deficiencies of the other. The character, therefore, which is compounded of wisdom and circumspection, with innocense and unoffending simplicity, is what Christ commended to his disciples, and what Paul wished the Romans to possess, when he said, "*I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.*"

Our Lord, in order to animate the courage and pious zeal of his disciples, assures them that they could not meet with any treatment more cruel and injurious, than what he had previously endured. To caution them against that timid spirit, which seeks to escape suffering by concealment, he gives them the following injunction: "*What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light; and what ye hear in the ear, that proclaim upon the housetops.*" This passage of scripture is supposed to refer to a custom of the Jews, mentioned by the Rabbis, who affirm, that the masters among them used to have their interpreters, who received their dictates whispered softly in the ear, and then publicly proposed them to all.

The houses in the East are, in many parts, so constructed, that the inhabitants can walk upon the roofs. From these eminences, it was convenient to announce any thing new, or address the crowd passing below. In the East, at the present day, proclamation is made from the tops of their mosques or temples, that "God is great, and Mahomet is his prophet," as a signal for the people to offer their stated prayers.

Our Lord also encouraged his disciples, by reminding them of the universal extent of divine providence. "*Are not*," said he, "*two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father.*" Our Saviour here teaches us, that, low as this bird is placed in the scale of being, it is the object of its Maker's care. What a striking lesson of trust in our heavenly Father, are we here taught! "*Are ye not*," says our Saviour, "*of more value than many sparrows?*"

Our Saviour cautions his disciples against entertaining the idea, that a state of rest and ease would be the immediate result of his ad-

vent. "*Think not,*" says he, "*that I am come to send peace on the earth, nay, but a sword.*" (See Matt. x. 34, 35.) The Jews supposed, that, when the Messiah should come, all kinds of temporal prosperity would abound in Judea. Dr. Doddridge and other able commentators maintain, that the word translated earth, in our version, often signifies merely the land of Judea, rather than the whole earth. Christ came not, therefore, to send upon the land of Judea those joyful and peaceable days which the Jews expected, but a sword and continual war, which finally terminated in the utter destruction of their country. As the Christian religion is eminently calculated to promote peace and happiness among men, it is obvious, that Christ here speaks, *prophetically*, of the consequences it would *occasionally* produce, through the evil passions of men; which the experience of the Christian world has verified. He refers not to the *design* of his coming, or of his religion, but to *the effects that would result from it*, perverted, as he foresaw that it would be, from the purposes of that infinite benevolence, in which it originated, and to which it is wholly to be ascribed.

LETTER XV.

On various Passages in our Lord's Discourses.

My dear Nieces,

Our Lord, in speaking of his indigent condition while on earth, says, "*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*" i. e. He had no secure and fixed place of residence. Natural history informs us, that the fox does not, like the wolf and other beasts of prey, wander in the desert without any certain place of rest, but lives in a settled, domestic state, knows well where to choose the situation of his dwelling, and how to render it safe and commodious. He digs his abode at the entrance of a wood, if possible, within hearing of some hamlet where his game is plenty; and at the bottom of a rock, or among the roots of trees, where he cannot be uncovered. He fits up the place he has chosen for his own accommodation. Here he

has a more settled habitation, than was that of the Saviour of sinners, while he dwelt with mankind. He who was "*appointed heir of all things*," submitted to be despised and rejected of men, and to move in the humblest walks of life. "*The poor*," says our Lord, "*have the gospel preached to them;*" and while on earth his conduct was distinguished by his attention and tenderness to the needy and destitute; while he taught, in energetic terms, the vanity and dangerous tendency of great riches and of worldly prosperity.

The Evangelists have recorded a striking instance of the fatal effect which the possession of great wealth produced on the mind of a young ruler, who appears to have been of an amiable character; for St. Mark informs us, that "*Jesus, beholding him, loved him.*" His veneration for our Saviour, and confidence in his ability to direct him, induced the young man to inquire with earnestness, "*What good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?*" When "*Jesus*" had "*said unto him, if thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have*

treasure in heaven; and come and follow me," the young man clearly evinced, that he valued his large possessions more than eternal life; for he went away sorrowful.

On this occasion, Jesus said to his disciples, "*How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*" To pass a camel through a needle's eye, was a proverbial expression among nations of high antiquity, denoting a difficulty which neither the art nor the power of man can surmount. The Talmudical writers have a similar proverb, concerning him who proposed to accomplish an impossibility, which they expressed in the following terms. "Thou art perchance from Pombeditha, where they send an elephant through the eye of a needle." Another Hebrew adage bears a striking resemblance to this. "They neither show one a golden palm, nor an elephant which enters though the eye of a needle." It was the object of our Lord, in using the figure which he employs, to show how ex-

tremely difficult it is for rich men to forsake all for God and truth, and thus obtain salvation. Riches naturally engage so much of a person's thought, care, and affection, as to leave him little time to attend to things of infinitely more importance.

Another allusion to the camel occurs in our Saviour's cutting reproof to the scribes and pharisees: "*Ye blind guides, which strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel.*" See Matt. xxiii. 24. In these words he charges them with being extremely scrupulous about very small matters, while they betrayed a glaring and criminal negligence respecting things of great importance. The design of our Lord was to teach, that the minutiæ of the law, in which the pharisees displayed such scrupulous accuracy, as the tithing of mint, annise, and cummin, were as much inferior to the weightier matters of the law, as a gnat is smaller than a camel.

In the same chapter, where the meek and benevolent Jesus reprehends the scribes and pharisees in the seat of their authority, he addresses them in these terms, which contain an

allusion to natural history. "*Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*" It is supposed that those of the pharisaic sect who set up as teachers and reformers of the people, and misled those who attended to their instructions, are here particularly reproved. Under pretence of superiour sanctity, they deceived the people, and concealed their immoral conduct. Probably, therefore, the word *serpents*, applied to the scribes and pharisees, denotes them to be insinuating, designing, poisonous creatures, whose familiarity is dangerous, and whose lessons are depraving—a "*generation of vipers*," who conceal the fang teeth and the poison in them, till the unhappy subject they have seized is fatally struck by them.

The people of Israel have been, from remotest times, a stiff-necked and rebellious race; and the scribes and pharisees proved themselves the genuine offspring of their wicked ancestors, enemies of God, and adversaries to all his true worshippers.

In our Lord's rebukes of the scribes and pharisees, which are recorded by the

Evangelists, (Matt. xxiii. Luke xii.) Dr. Campbell supposes, that "he was not acting in the character of a judge, pronouncing sentence upon the guilty, or dooming them to punishment. The office of judge is part of the glory to which he was not to be exalted till after his humiliation and sufferings. But he speaks here merely in the character of a prophet, or teacher divinely enlightened, as to the consequences of men's actions, and whose zeal for their good obliged him to give them warning."

LETTER XVI.

On the Gentleness and Humility of our Lord.

My dear Nieces,

"Isaiah, in predicting the gentleness and sweetness, the caution and tenderness, with which the Messiah shall manage his administration, happily illustrates it by a proverb; '*the bruised reed he shall not break, the dimly burning flax he shall not quench.*' Isaiah xiii. 3. He shall not break even a bruised reed, which snaps asunder immediately; nor shall he extinguish even the smoaking flax, or the wick of a lamp, which, when it first begins to kindle, is put out by every little motion. With such kind and condescending regards to the weakest of his people, and to the first openings and symptoms of a hopeful character, shall he proceed, till he send forth judgment unto victory, or till he make his righteous cause gloriously triumphant over all opposition. And this gentle and gracious adminis-

tration shall charm mankind, in so sensible and irresistible a manner, that the gentiles shall confide in his illustrious name, and distant, yea, barbarous nations shall seek their refuge and salvation in his grace."*

The meekness and humility of our Redeemer were eminently displayed, in every scene of his life, and throughout his instructions. "*Come unto me,*" says he, "*all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" The pure and spiritual religion of the gospel may well be called light and easy; and is strongly contrasted with the heavy burdens imposed by the Jewish teachers.

When the disciples, full of aspiring views of the power and pre-eminence which they expected to enjoy in the Messiah's temporal kingdom, "*disputed among themselves who should be greatest,*" Jesus, in order to teach them humility, and prepare them for his spi-

* See Harris' Natural History of the Bible.

ritual reign, placed a little child in the midst of them, and commended its docility, simplicity, and freedom from ambition and guile, as worthy of their imitation.

The meekness of our Saviour was exhibited, in his rebuking his disciples, James and John, who requested him to permit them to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans, when they refused to receive Christ, because "*his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.*" The Samaritans had formerly given our Lord a kind reception, in one of their towns, after his conversing with the Samaritan woman, at the well of Sichar. Their present inhospitable treatment was occasioned by religious jealousy; as they thought that Jesus was going to celebrate one of the solemn feasts at Jerusalem, and was thus preferring the temple in that place, to their temple on Mount Gerizim. Josephus relates a quarrel which took place between the Jews and Samaritans, when the former were going up through the country of the latter, to keep the feast of the Passover at Jerusalem. At such times, the religious bigotry of the Sama-

ritans rendered them peculiarly inhospitable; and they felt exasperated, that Christ, whom they considered as a great prophet, should exhibit a decided preference for the Jewish worship.

The national animosity of the disciples against this people, was excited to such a degree by their treatment of our Saviour, that they wished to consume them with fire from heaven. On this occasion, our Lord rebuked their intemperate zeal. But his censure wore a benign aspect, and suggested their ignorance as a palliation of their conduct. "*Ye know not*," said he, "*what manner of spirit ye are of, for the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them.*" That is, their vindictive temper was contrary to the spirit of the Christian religion, which they had professed to embrace, and unworthy the character of the disciples of him who gave his life for the redemption of mankind.

Our Lord, in every part of his behaviour to his disciples, exhibited an illustrious example of benevolence and condescension. He compassionated their weakness, instructed their

ignorance, reproved their ambitious spirit, and rectified their mistaken ideas of his kingdom. He gave them a lesson of humility, by performing the menial office of washing their feet. This condescension of our Saviour was intended, in a striking manner, to teach them by action, what he had previously taught by precept, that his kingdom was not to be a temporal one; and that, instead of coveting earthly honours and distinctions, they ought not to think any employment degrading, by which they might serve each other, or benefit mankind.

Having, through every part of his life, given an illustrious example of benevolence and humility, he, at his death, in the midst of his suffering, breathed out a prayer for his murderers, alleging the only extenuation of their guilt of which it was capable, saying, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

LETTER XVII.

On our Lord's Parables.

My dear Nieces,

I will now direct your attention to the parables of our Lord, all of which are replete with instruction. The word parable is often used in Scripture in a general sense, and applied to short sayings or aphorisms, full of sentiment, and expressed in a figurative or proverbial manner. We frequently find in our Saviour's discourses, comparisons which are short and lively, having a beautiful tendency to illustrate his argument, and place it in a more easy and familiar point of view. But these are not parables in the same sense with the larger and longer narratives of a figurative kind, to which that appellation more properly belongs. A parable, strictly so called, is a continued comparison, or extended similitude, in which objects of a moral and spiritual nature are represented by images or examples,

drawn from things sensible, and from the occurrences of this present life.

This figurative method of communicating knowledge was much in use among the ancients, especially among the Eastern nations, and particularly the Syrians, Arabians, and Jews. So that our Lord, in his method of teaching, accommodated himself to the taste of the people among whom he lived and conversed.

The inhabitants of the East were induced, by the despotic nature of their governments, to make use of this method of conveying reproof, which might exasperate, rather than correct, if delivered in plain language. Even at the present time, in the East, information respecting oppressive acts of government is conveyed to the tyrannical Asiatic rulers, under the semblance of parables. An ancient instance of this occurs in the reproof conveyed to David by the prophet Nathan, in the parable of the poor man and the ewe lamb. The prophet, in this way, engaged the attention of the king, excited the passions of pity and indignation, and then, by the application, "*thou*

art the man," made him sensible of the greatness of his crime, which induced him to become a sincere and humble penitent for his aggravated offence.

Our Lord's parables are of two kinds, practical and prophetic. The former of which relate more immediately to various parts of our duty to God and our neighbour; and the latter refer particularly to the character of the Messiah, and the spiritual nature of his kingdom; to the persecution of himself and followers; to the rejection of his doctrine by the Jews, and to its acceptance by the gentiles —truths, which were at that time so repugnant to the prejudices of his countrymen, that their full and unreserved disclosure would have occasioned a general disgust among his followers. Hence our Saviour did not choose to open them even to his disciples, except by degrees, as their moral notions became more pure, and their intellectual sight more able to endure the unclouded splendour of the light of immortality.

The mode of instructing by parables has the peculiar advantage of engaging men's at-

tention unawares, without giving alarm to their prejudices and passions. It is particularly suited to an early and uncultivated state of society, before the minds of men can enter into abstract reasoning, or understand the force of argument. Jesus Christ, therefore, with the utmost propriety, used this mode of instruction, to represent spiritual things, by easy similitudes, to his infant church.

An ingenious author observes, that "all the parables of our Redeemer, are so many judicious lessons, admirably adapted to rouse the understanding, to engage the affections, and to touch the sensibility of his hearers, by the most delicate strokes of nature and passion. Indeed we might almost appeal to his parables alone, for the authenticity of our Saviour's pretentions to a heavenly designation."

LETTER XVIII.

On the Parable of the good Samaritan.

My dear Nieces,

The beautiful parable of the good Samaritan strongly exhibits the prejudices of the Jewish nation, who, as we learn from our Lord himself, had established it as a maxim, that they were to love their neighbour, and hate their enemy. As they considered none their neighbours but their own countrymen, the consequence was, that they imagined themselves at liberty to hate all the rest of the world. They indulged this liberty without reserve, and against none with more bitterness, than the contiguous nation of the Samaritans. When, therefore, the lawyer in the Gospel asked our Lord who was his neighbour, had Christ attempted to prove to him by argument, that he was to consider all mankind, even his enemies the Samaritans, as his neighbours, the lawyer would have treated his an-

swer with contempt; and all his native prejudices and absurd traditions would have risen up in arms against so offensive a doctrine. But our Saviour, well knowing the impossibility of convincing the lawyer by direct argument, related to him a parable of the Jewish traveller who fell among robbers, was stripped, wounded, and left half dead upon the spot. In this distressed situation, "*by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.*" "*And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and also passed by on the other side.*"

It is conjectured that the priest resided in Jericho, to which place he was returning, after performing his periodical duty in the service of the temple; where he had been offering sacrifice to God, imploring his forgiveness, and supplicating his favor, for himself and his nation. But he had officiated at the temple without learning humanity; and though not only a fellow creature, but a brother Israelite, one of those, for whose welfare he had recently offered prayers in the temple, was lying

in agony by the way side, he only stopped to gaze on his misery, and then proceeded on his own way. The inhumanity of the priest was equalled by the Levite, who came near the spot, and, coldly surveying the unhappy man, passed on, destitute of sympathy. He perhaps was repairing to Jerusalem, for the purpose of singing hymns and hosannas in the temple, and, it may be, secretly congratulated himself on the rigor of his piety, in rather suffering a fellow creature to perish, than omit any part of his professional duty.

We are informed that a certain Samaritan next passed the road, who appears to have had some more rational notions of religion, and more tender feelings of humanity, than either the priest or Levite. Though he was of a nation abhorred by the Jews, who shrunk with horror from any social intercourse with the Samaritans, and though the road was infested with robbers, to whose attacks he was every moment exposed, and it was not improbable he might himself be accused by the malicious Jews of having robbed and wounded the very stranger whose life he saved; yet

these considerations could not chill the ardor of his humanity. Despising personal inconvenience, he hastens to the assistance of the wounded man. He strives to relieve the wants, and sooth the woes, of a stranger and an enemy. "*He went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him upon his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.*" He then consigned the poor man to the charge of others, enjoining his host to treat him kindly, and undertaking himself to defray every expense.

Our Lord, at the conclusion of this parable, having, probably, in some degree, overcome the prejudices, and softened the feelings, of the lawyer by his pathetic recital, puts this question to the inquirer: "*Which now, of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour to him that fell among thieves?*" The lawyer was constrained to give an answer, but he seems cautiously to avoid mentioning the name of *Samaritan;* for he says, "*He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus, go thou, and do likewise,*" which was, in effect, to command him to lay aside selfishness, partial-

ity, and bigotry. In this parable, our Saviour has also taught us, that the moral ties of reciprocal benevolence between man and man, in all nations of the earth, were prior in time to the precepts of the Mosaic institution; and that the precepts of that institution were not intended to weaken the force, or to diminish the importance, of the original law of our nature. On the contrary, the real tendency of the Mosaic code, as the abridged summary of its duties is expressed by Moses, Deut. vi. 5. Levit. xix. 18. was, by forcibly impressing the love of God on the minds and hearts of men, to make them, on all occasions, as far as they have ability, willing and active in doing good to their suffering fellow creatures.

This parable (which is by some supposed to be the narrative of a real transaction) was delivered soon after the feast of tabernacles, at a time when many were actually going from Jerusalem to different parts of the country. Its scene is, with great propriety, laid in the mountainous desert between Jerusalem and Jericho. From the testimony of Josephus it appears, that not only Judea, in general, was

at that time over-run with robbers, who committed the greatest excesses, but also, that this very road, which lay between Jerusalem and Jericho, was particularly infested with banditti. It was favorable to their villany, as it lay through wild and dreary solitudes. On account of the frequent robberies committed upon it, accompanied with murder, it was, as Jerome tells us, called *the bloody way.*

LETTER XIX.

On the Parable of the prodigal Son.

My dear Nieces,

An ingenious author observes, that the parable of the prodigal son is, perhaps, the most beautiful and instructive which came from the lips of him "who spoke as never man spake." In order to understand its excellence, it is necessary to keep in mind the occasion on which it was delivered, and the connexion in which it stands. The parables in Luke xv. concerning the lost sheep, the pieces of silver, and the prodigal son, were all uttered by our Lord on a particular occasion. "*Then*," says the Evangelist, "*all the publicans and sinners drew near to hear him. And the pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, this man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.*" Therefore, to repress the insolence of the one party, and to cheer the dejected minds of the other, our Lord gives an affect-

ing description of the kindness and compassion of our heavenly Father, and his readiness to forgive penitent sinners.

In this parable, the Evangelist describes a certain man, who had two sons; of whom the elder remained with, and served him all his life. The younger, who is the principal figure in the parable, was impatient of the discipline and order of his father's house. He therefore demanded and obtained his part of the family estate, and took his journey into a far country, "*and there wasted his substance with riotous living;*" and having spent all the fortune which he had received, was reduced to poverty, wretchedness, and the lowest menial servitude. At length, his complicated distress inspired him with the resolution of returning to his father's house, and of casting himself, as a sincere penitent, upon his compassion. The Evangelist describes the paternal tenderness with which he was received, in the most affecting manner. "*But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell upon his neck, and kissed him.*" The son exclaim-

ed, "*Father I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*" Before he could finish the humiliating words he was about to utter, "*make me as one of thy hired servants,*" he was interrupted by his rejoicing father, eager to exhibit proof of his reconciliation to him, and his paternal affection. "*He said to his servants, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*"

The rejoicing parent gives his son the most affectionate welcome. His command to bring the best robe, a garment not to be worn by a servant, was a declaration the most affecting which can be imagined, how far he was from intending to treat his penitent son like a servant. The ring and the shoes speak the same language. The father celebrated his return by a splendid entertainment, amidst the joyful congratulations of his numerous friends assembled on this happy occasion.

While the guests were indulging in innocent mirth, the elder son drew nigh to the house, and heard music and dancing; and having enquired the cause, he censured the conduct of his generous father, exhibited a peevish and envious temper towards his brother, and refused to partake of the entertainment. His indulgent parent leaves the company, and intreats him, in the most condescending manner, to lay aside his discontent, and to join in their festivity on his brother's account. Instead of complying, he renews his complaints, and even charges his father with injustice to him, and partiality in his behaviour towards his youngest son. His father, in his reply, beautifully blends the authority of a parent with kindness and condescension. He does not give him the severe rebuke which his petulant behaviour deserved; nor controvert the justice of his arrogant boast of his own superior claim to favour, but satisfied himself with declaring, in the strongest terms, his unfeigned regard and affection for him. "*And he said unto him, Son thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was*

meet that we should make merry, and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

The author of the Appendix to Calmet's Dictionary, makes the following remarks on the parable of the prodigal son. "I suppose it has always appeared to the reader, that the father, in this parable, received the young man with tenderness and affection when he returned home. But I think the honour which is implied in some circumstances of his reception, acquires additional spirit, from an occurrence related by Major Rooke. English readers, when they peruse the account of the music and dancing heard by the eldest son, are ready to imagine that the family, or a part of it, were dancing to the music, because such would be the case among ourselves; whereas the fact is, that not only a band of music, but a band of dancers also, according to Eastern usage, were *hired*, whose agility was now entertaining the numerous company of friends, assembled by the father on this joyful occasion. This is an additional expression of honour paid to the prodigal. To our Lord's

auditory, this particular would convey the idea, not merely that the father was glad of his son's safe return, but also, that he treated him as if he had returned from some honourable pilgrimage, as from Mecca, (in the subjoined extracts;) for so we find Hadje Cassim, a respectable Eastern chief, acting on account of his son's return from thence. He forgot his ill conduct in going away, and felt only his wisdom in returning. Besides treating him with the best in his house, he put himself to additional expense, and introduced him honourably, not only to his family, but to his friends around him, whom he had assembled to grace his reception."

The passage from Major Rooke, referred to in what precedes, is as follows: "Hadje Cassim, who is a Turk, and one of the richest merchants in Cairo, had interceded in my behalf with Ibrahim Bey, at the request of his son, who had been on a pilgrimage to Mecca, and came from Juddah in the same ship with me. The father, in celebration of his son's return, gave a most magnificent *fête*, on the evening of the day of my captivity; and as

soon as I was released, sent to invite me to partake of it, and I accordingly went. The company consisted of two or three hundred Turks, who were sitting on sofas and benches, smoking their long pipes. The room in which they were assembled was a spacious and lofty hall, in the centre of which was a band of Music, composed of the finest Turkish instruments, and some vocal performers. The scene being new to me, was for that reason very interesting."

The author of the Appendix to Calmet observes, that he thinks "this adds a spirit to the elder brother's expressions: '*Thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends.*' And as this entertainment was given in the evening, it agrees with the circumstance of the elder brother's return from the field, implying his labours there, which certainly are not forgotten by himself when he says, '*These many years have I served thee.*' Now, if the Jewish nation is alluded to, in the person of the elder son, the arrogance of that people is described by a fit emblem. And if the gentiles are meant by the

prodigal, it cannot but be pleasing to us, who are gentiles by nature, to form a higher estimate than heretofore, of the honour bestowed upon him by his father."

The primary design of this inimitable parable, in describing the affectionate behaviour of an earthly parent towards an undutiful son who is brought to repentance, is to illustrate, in a beautiful and pathetic manner, the benignity and compassion of our heavenly Father towards penitent sinners; and his gracious reception, and entire forgiveness of the past offences, of those who return to him by sincere repentence. Learned divines have also supposed, that this parable, like many others of our Lord's, was prophetic; and that the two sons have a particular reference to the Jews and gentiles. The former of whom, particularly the pharisees, instead of rejoicing at the conversion of the gentiles, their natural brethren, were filled with envy, and murmured against God; who, like the indulgent father in the parable, on the repentance of the gentiles, represented by the younger son, was affording them a most gracious reception into the gospel dispensation.

LETTER XX.

On the Parable of Dives and Lazarus.

MY DEAR NIECES,

The instructive parable of Dives and Lazarus, to be found in Luke xvi. 19—31, appears to have been particularly addressed by our Lord to certain rich pharisees, who are reproached by the historian, with the character of being "*covetous*," and who, notwithstanding their immoral conduct, procured great attention and respect from the multitude, on account of their large possessions. The vices specified in the parable are, sensuality, luxury, and insensibility to the wants of their fellow creatures.

The descriptions given of the principal persons in this parable, reflect additional beauty on each part of it, by the strong contrast in which these individuals stand with each other. "*There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared*

sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, who was laid at the gate, full of sores, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table."

The gate of a rich man was the place where beggars stood, or were laid, and asked alms. Hence it was a rule with the Jews, "If a man die, and leave sons and daughters, with but a small substance, the daughters shall be taken care of, and the sons shall beg at the gate."

The account of the rich man is descriptive of great affluence. Purple, which was the habit of kings and princes, was deemed in the East the richest and most superb of dresses. The purple of the ancients consisted of fine linen dyed of this colour. Hence it is here described as purple and fine linen. But though Dives indulged all his own appetites, spared no expense to adorn himself in rich apparel, and fared sumptuously every day, he cared not for the sufferings of the poor and miserable though placed before his sight. His profusion was without charity; and his external splendor was a gilded cover to the deformity of his soul.

While this rich man appears to have possessed every luxury, Lazarus seems to have united in his person all the evils which belong to human wretchedness. He was so feeble and diseased, that he could not walk to the rich man's gate, but was obliged to be carried thither; so poor, that he was willing to accept the crumbs which fell from his table, in which he was probably gratified; and so destitute of clothing, that his ulcerated limbs appear to have been uncovered. But the rich man did nothing to relieve his distress. The picture is still heightened by the following circumstance. "*Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.*" No words could more strongly describe the utter neglect, which was shown to this unhappy beggar, than by representing all the notice he obtained, as proceeding from these animals. The narrative seems to intimate, that the sufferings of Lazarus were insupportable by human nature; for it is added, "*And it came to pass, that the beggar died.*" "*The rich man also died, and was buried.*" He was interred with great pomp and ceremony. Lazarus indeed was

laid in the ground as well as he; but the mention of the circumstance of Dives being buried, was to shew, that funeral honours were paid to him, which were denied to Lazarus.

After death, the grand contrast begins. "The beggar is carried by angels into Abraham's bosom." The Jews believed that the spirits of the just were conveyed by angels to a seat of felicity. They likewise conceived of heaven under the figure of an entertainment, at which there should be present Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with all the blessed. This figure was sometimes adopted by Christ. It is here alluded to in the expression, that Lazarus was carried to Abraham's bosom. The ancients did not sit at their meals, but reclined on long seats, like sofas, resting on their left arm, so that the head of one person was placed on or near the bosom of another. This is what is referred to in John xiii. 23. where the beloved disciple is said to have been leaning on Jesus' bosom; that is, he was placed next to him at supper. In like manner, when it is said in this parable, that Lazarus was carried to Abraham's bosom, it

is meant that he was conveyed to a most distinguished place near to Abraham, at the great entertainment in heaven.

Of the rich man, it is said, on the other hand, "*And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*" He petitions the patriarch, that he would send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue. By our Lord's describing the rich man as applying to Abraham for relief, he might intend to reprove the arrogance of the Jews, who boasted of their descent from that patriarch, and trusted in his merits to deliver them from future punishment. In the Talmud, it is said: "In the future world Abraham will sit at the gate of hell, and will not suffer any circumcised Israelite to descend into it." Our Saviour might intend to teach the Jews, by Abraham's mouth, that he would not afford any help to the sinners of Israel. It is to be observed, that the patriarch, even when he saw the rich man in this place of torment, calls him "*son.*" Upon the rich man's requesting Abraham to send Lazarus to warn

his five brethren, the patriarch answers, "*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.*" Our Lord caused this to be exemplified in the most literal manner himself, by raising another Lazarus from the dead. Instead of thus convincing the unbelieving Jews, they were so much the more exasperated, and from that moment conspired both the death of our Saviour and of Lazarus. After this, Christ himself arose from the dead, and his apostles restored some dead persons to life; yet still multitudes of the Jewish nation persisted in unbelief, and obstinately rejected the Gospel.

The lessons this instructive parable teaches us are, that there will be a state of retribution, where those who live a sensual life, regardless of the sufferings of others, shall not escape punishment. That the gifts of Providence are a trust from our Creator, to be employed in his service, and we are accountable to him for a proper use of them. That the good, however poor and destitute, shall be recompensed; and the wicked, however rich and

powerful, punished. That the present apparent inequalities in the divine government shall be rectified in a future state; the triumphs of vice humbled, and the afflictions of virtue exchanged for a crown of glory.

LETTER XXI.

On the Parable of the Marriage Supper.

My dear Nieces,

I will proceed to make some observation on the xxii. chapter of Matthew, in which our Lord introduces the following parable: "*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son. And he sent forth his servants, to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, tell them which are bidden, 'Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.' But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, and another to his merchandize. And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and*

burnt up their city. Then said he to his servants, the wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye, therefore, into the highways; and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called but few are chosen."

It appears to be the principle object of our Lord in this parable, under the image of a marriage feast, to represent the invitation given to the Jews to embrace the Gospel, their rejection of that gracious offer, the severe punishment inflicted upon them for their ingratitude and obstinacy, and the admission

of the heathen to the privileges of Christianity in their room.

The dispensation of the Almighty with regard to the Christian religion, which is called the kingdom of heaven, may be compared to the conduct of a certain king, who gave a splendid feast on the marriage of his son. Both the Jewish and Christian covenants are frequently represented in Scripture, under the similitude of a marriage contract between God and his people. See Isaiah liv. 5. Matt. xxv. 1—13. Hence there appears a peculiar propriety in this comparison. The king's repeatedly sending his servants to call those who were bidden to the wedding, signifies the various and repeated offers of the Gospel to the Jews, first, by John the Baptist, then by our Saviour himself, and next by the apostles and the seventy disciples, both before and after his ascension.

A large part of the Hebrew nation, rejected all these gracious invitations with contempt. "*They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandize, and the remnant took his servants, and entreat-*

ed them spitefully, and slew them." They not only despised and rejected the words of eternal life, and preferred worldly pleasures and interests to the joys of heaven, but pursued with unceasing rancour the first preachers of the Gospel, even unto death.

"*But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth, and sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city.*" These words are prophetic of the destruction of the Jewish nation by the Roman armies, under the emperors Vespasian, and his son Titus, who, not many years after this was spoken, besieged Jerusalem, laid waste the city, and slaughtered an immense number of the inhabitants. This terrible devastation our Lord here predicts in general terms, as he does more particularly and minutely in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew. He here represents this visitation as the judgment of God on this obstinate people, for their rejection and crucifixion of Christ, their cruel treatment of his apostles and the preachers of his religion, and for their other atrocious crimes.

The king, however, determined to find other guests to partake of his magnificent entertainment; and as those, who were first invited, proved themselves unworthy of his favour, he sent other servants into the public roads, ordering them to invite all they should meet, of every rank, description, and character. Accordingly, they collected a sufficient number to furnish the wedding with guests.

The picture which our Lord here exhibits, of a king making a royal entertainment; and, upon the refusal of those whom he had invited to attend, sending his servants into the highways to collect the travellers and strangers they could find, among whom, according to St. Luke's Gospel, were "*the poor, the maimed, and blind,*" is not, perhaps, so unlike life, as we may have imagined; and our Lord describes a scene which corresponds with existing customs. Dr. Pocoke says, the Arabs never set by any thing that is brought to table; so that, when they kill a sheep, they dress it all, call in their neighbours, and the poor, and finish every thing; and that an Arab prince will often dine in the street before his door,

and call to all that pass, even beggars, in the usual expression of, Bismillah; that is, "in the name of God;" who come and sit down; and, when they have done, depart with the usual form of returning thanks. We see here a proof of the correspondence of the various facts and circumstances recorded in the sacred writings, to the truth of history, and to ancient oriental usages and manners.

This part of the parable relates to the calling in of the gentiles to the privileges of the Gospel, after these had been rejected by the Jews. The gracious invitations of the Gospel extended to all. No exceptions, no distinctions were to be made. The servants gathered together all, as many as they found, both good and bad; and great numbers embraced the gracious offers of salvation made to them by the Gospel.

In order to understand the part of the parable respecting the wedding garment, it is necessary to know, that it was the custom of Eastern monarchs to send superb vestments to all whom they invited to an entertainment. In the East, even at the present

day, it is expected that every one, who has received a garment from the king, will immediately clothe himself in it, readily present himself, and render his homage to the giver; otherwise he incurs the king's displeasure. The refusal of a present is, in the East, considered as highly offensive to good manners, and as a mark of contempt of the giver. Hence, in the parable, the king exhibits his indignation against the bold intruder who dared to appear at the marriage feast, without the nuptial garment with which he had been furnished.

It is common in Scripture to represent those dispositions which distinguish the whole character, under the figure of bodily garments and external habits. Thus Job says of himself, "*I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my judgment was a cloak and a diadem.*" Thus we are commanded *to put on charity, to be clothed with humility.* And in the Revelations, xix. 7, 8, we find a beautiful illustration in point. "*The marriage of the Lamb is come, and to her* (that is, the church) *was granted that she should be ar-*

rayed in fine linen, clean and white;" and "*the fine linen,*" we are expressly told, is "*the righteousness of the saints.*"

Though this parable, in its primary intention, relates to the rejection of the Jews and the calling of the gentiles, yet it has, like many other of our Lord's parables, a secondary reference to persons of every age and nation who reject the Christian revelation, or who, professing to receive it, live in direct opposition to its doctrines and precepts. The same future punishment which is denounced against the unbelieving or hypocritical Jews, will be with equal strictness inflicted on them.

LETTER XXII.

On the Parable of the Pharisee and Publican.

MY DEAR NIECES,

In perusing the New Testament, I wish you to attend to the numerous instances in which our Lord exhibited his benignity and compassion to those who were truly penitent, even if they had been notorious sinners. When the scribes and pharisees murmured against him and his disciples, for eating and drinking with publicans and sinners, in the house of Matthew, he replied, "*They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*" "*I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*" And on another occasion, he spoke three parables, in vindication of a similar conduct, shewing its propriety from the consideration that there was *joy in heaven over repentant sinners*, and that God readily embraced such with the arms of his mercy.

The Evangelist informs us, that our Lord spoke the parable of the pharisee and publican, "*to certain persons who tsusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.*" This parable presents to view two characters, that of a proud, ill natured hypocrite, and that of an humble, penitent sinner.

"*Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a pharisee, and the other a publican. The pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in a week, and give tythes of all I possess.' But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.'*" Luke xviii. 10—13.

The pharisees affected superior sanctity, but were really detestable hypocrites. They were excessively proud, covetous, censorious, and insatiably fond of applause, power, and pre-eminence. They studied to appear righteous before men, but within were full of extortion, hypocrisy, and all manner of iniquity.

The publicans, being employed in an office highly offensive to their countrymen, that of collecting the tribute, which the Jews were compelled to pay to the Roman emperor, became such objects of general odium, that a *heathen*, and a *publican*, were terms of equal reproach. We find, however, by our Saviour's account of them, that they more readily and generally embraced the Gospel than the pharisees. Hence our Lord says, "They enter into the kingdom before you." They repented at the preaching of John, and attended to the doctrines of Christ; while the pharisees, in opposition to both, persisted in their unbelief and impenitence.

"*Two men went up to the temple to pray.*" Here is an allusion to the common custom of the Jews, who, in their prayers, resorted to the temple, if their situation was near it. If they were remote, they prayed with their faces turned towards the temple. "*The pharisee,*" continues the parable, "*stood and prayed thus within himself, 'God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.*

I fast twice in a week, I give tythes of all I possess.' "

The late excellent Mr. Buckminster makes the following remarks upon the prayer of the pharisee.

" He first thanks his God that he is not as other men are, an extortioner. He had not wrung from his debtors their hard earnings, nor snatched the bread from their children's mouths, nor left the parents to pine away in the cold damps of a dungeon. He had always been contented with sober gains. To the publicans he had cheerfully left the collection of a hateful tribute; therefore, he had been guilty of none of the extortions and oppressions of office; concerned in no usurious contracts, or cruel impositions. He was surprisingly free from sins, which he had neither opportunity nor temptation to commit; and, with this wondrous purity, he comes into the temple of his God to indulge his self complacency!

" He next is thankful that he is not an adulterer. He has not been willing to run the dangerous risk of being stoned to death by

the laws of Moses, of which he was, perhaps, a constituted expositor; and for this, too, he thanks his God.

"The catalogue of his excellencies would, perhaps, soon have been exhausted, even in his own account, had he not, perchance, turned his eyes upon a poor publican, who had also come up to the temple to pray. The sight of this man adds another clause to his impious prayer. "*God, I thank thee I am not as this publican!*" The publicans were a class of men exceedingly odious to the Jews, because they were the appointed collectors of a revenue which, with a reluctance never to be subdued, was paid by this obstinate nation to the emperor of Rome. It is true, the receivers of this tribute were, in general, not less iniquitous than hateful; and nothing but the most extravagant propensity to self applause could have found any satisfaction in a consciousness of superiority to this despised class of his countrymen. Here, indeed, closes the pharisee's enumeration of vices, in abstaining from which he congratulates himself.

"The pharisee, however, in the parable, relies not entirely on his freedom from atrocious guilt. He has yet in reserve some works of supererogation, to recommend himself more certainly to the God who hears and disdains his prayer. "*I fast*," says he, "*twice in a week; I give tythes of all I possess.*" These fasts, it should be observed, were not required by the laws of Moses. They were imposed only by the traditions of the Rabbins, and adapted to impress an ignorant populace with an opinion of their peculiar sanctity, temperance, piety, and punctuality."

"'*The publican*,' continues our Saviour, '*standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*' There is nothing in the history which would lead us to conclude, that this humble worshipper had been guilty of enormous sins, that any unexpiated crime pressed upon his conscience, and drew forth this exclamation of abasement and remorse. He was, perhaps, as honourable, as pure, and as devout, as was expected of the class to which he belonged in the com-

munity. Still we see him smiting his breast with anguish, and hear him exclaiming, '*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*"

The prayer of the pharisee evinced a high degree of pride and censoriousness. He thanks God that he is not like the publican. Perhaps he knew little, or nothing, of the publican's character. It was enough, that he belonged to a class of men who gave great offence to his countrymen. It is said, that the Hebrew nation would not eat with a Jewish publican; that they avoided him no less than they did the heathens; and that they would neither make marriages with any of his family, admit him into their synagogues, nor receive his testimony as a witness to any fact.

On the other hand, the publican's prayer proceeded from a heart penetrated with a sense of his sins; and he humbly implores the mercy of God. "He stood *afar off*, (probably in the court of the gentiles,) and would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'" In the spirit of true humility, he supplicated the divine forgiveness,

which he obtained. For our Lord informs us, "*This man went down to his house justified, rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*"

LETTER XXIII.

On the Parable of a Nobleman who went to receive a Kingdom.

My dear Nieces,

I wish you to observe the beautiful variety, as well as the divine excellence, of our Saviour's parables. In some of them he appears to allude to historical facts which took place during his abode on earth. Thus in St. Luke's Gospel, chapter xix. he describes "*a certain nobleman, who went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.*" Those who, by succession or interest, had pretentions to the kingdom of Judea, travelled to Rome to have it confirmed to them by the emperor and senate. Herod the Great was established in his kingdom by Mark Antony; and Archelaus his son, after the death of his father, went to Rome, to receive from Augustus the confirmation of his father's will, by which he had the kingdom of

Judea assigned to him. Our Lord, perhaps, had the latter fact in view, when he framed this striking parable.

The Evangelist Luke informs us, that this parable was delivered by our Lord to those who accompanied him, "*because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear*," that is, that Christ after his arrival in the city, would establish a temporal kingdom, and deliver them from subjection to the Romans.

He said, therefore, "*A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.*" The nobleman represents our Saviour, who, having finished his ministry on earth, ascended into heaven to receive the glory reserved for him by the Father.

Before the nobleman sat out on his journey, "*he called his ten servants, and delivered to them ten pounds, and said unto them, 'occupy till I come.'*" The pound given to each of his servants, to trade with until his return, represents the gifts, abilities, or possessions,

entrusted to each person, to glorify God, by doing good to mankind.

The citizens, we are informed, hated him and opposed his government. This represents the manner in which the unbelieving Jews rejected the Messiah, persecuted his apostles, and exerted themselves to the utmost to prevent the promulgation of the Christian religion. The return of the nobleman appears to relate to Christ's coming, in a figurative sense, to reign over his followers, that is, to the establishment of his spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, or Christianity; which was accompanied by the destruction of his obstinate enemies, the unbelieving Jews.

The Evangelist proceeds to state, that "*when he returned, having received the kingdom, he commanded those servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.*" But though their trust, or stock, was the same, yet their success was very different. The two first obtained the approbation of their Lord; and each was rewarded according to his diligence and im-

provement. And he said unto him who had gained ten pounds, "*Well, thou good servant; because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And he said likewise to him who had gained five pounds, Be thou also over five cities.*"

We may learn from this parable, that our Lord will apportion the happiness of men, in a future life, to the progress they make in virtue and holiness, in this probationary state.

And the third came, saying, "*Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.*"

Those selfish and indolent people are here described, who, living only for themselves, neglect their duty to God, and make no exertions to alleviate the miseries, and promote the happiness of their fellow creatures. Such persons often excuse themselves, because they do not commit atrocious crimes. But our Saviour severely reprimands him who neglected to improve the pound which was given him

to trade with, and ordered it to be given to the man who had ten pounds. "*And he said unto him, wherefore gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with interest?*"

After the Lord had punished the slothful servant, by depriving him of his pound, he said to his followers, "*Unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.*" That is, unto those who have, by their wise and persevering exertions, improved the abilities God has given them, more shall be added, in consequence of the improvement itself. Their moral, intellectual, and religious privileges shall be enlarged by their energetic exertions. On the contrary, from those whose indolence precludes improvement, their unimproved ability is taken away, and they gradually sink into a greater incapacity, by neglecting to make a proper use of what they literally may be said to possess.

Our Lord thus concludes this instructive parable. "*But those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither,*

and slay them before me." Our Saviour here alludes to the terrible slaughter which awaited the Jews for their obstinate unbelief; and which terminated in the utter destruction of their city and temple.

LETTER XXIV.

On the Funeral Rites of the Jews.

My dear Nieces,

The treatment of the lifeless body has varied in different ages and countries. It appears by the New Testament, that it was the custom of the Hebrews, in the time of our Saviour, to wrap the body round with many folds of linnen, and the head in a separate cloth. See John xi. 44. xix. 40. xx. 7. It was also their custom to expend upon the dead aromatic substances, especially myrrh and aloes. A modern Jew has made an objection against the history of the New Testament, from the account of the quantity of spices used at the interment of the body of Christ; which, he says, was unnecessarily profuse, and even incredible. But it appears from the writings of the Jews, that spices were used at such times in great abundance. In the Talmud, it is said, that eighty pounds

of aromatic substances were consumed at the funeral of Rabbi Gamaliel, the elder. And, according to Josephus, at the funeral of Herod, the procession was followed by five hundred of his domestics, carrying spices. Why then should it be thought incredible, that Nicodemus brought a hundred pounds weight of myrrh and aloes to embalm the body of Jesus? This was a proof of his warm attachment to his divine Instructer; for, according to Josephus, the larger the quantity of spices which the Jews used in interments, the greater honour was thought to be done to the dead.

A box, or coffin, for the dead, was not used, except in Babylon and Egypt. The corpse, wrapt in folds of linen, was placed upon a bier. Thus the son of the widow of Nain, whom our compassionate Saviour restored to life, was carried forth. The bearers appear to have travelled rapidly in the time of Christ, as they do at the present day among the modern Jews. Luke vii. 14.

Sepulchres, otherwise called the *everlasting houses*, were commonly situated beyond the limits of cities and villages. Matt. viii. 28.

Luke vii. 12. The Mosaic law respecting defilement, by means of dead bodies, seems to have rendered it necessary, that places for burial should not be situated within them. It was also the custom among other nations, as well as among the Hebrews, (and continues to be the practice to the present day in the East,) to bury out of the city; except in the case of kings and very distinguished men, whose ashes were commonly permitted to repose within it. The sepulchres of the Hebrew kings were upon Mount Zion. See 2 Kings xiv. 20. The Hebrews generally exhibited a preference for burying their dead in gardens, and beneath shady trees. See Genesis xxxv. 8. 1 Samuel xxxi. 13. 2 Kings xxi. 8. We find that Joseph of Arimathea had prepared a tomb for himself in a garden, in which our Lord was buried. John xix. 41. In Eastern countries, at the present day, green boughs and flowers are used in ornamenting sepulchres; and sometimes herbs and flowers are planted about the graves of the dead.

The sepulchres of the Jews, who were able to afford the necessary expense, were exten-

sive caves, or vaults, which were in some instances the work of nature; in some, artificial excavations of the earth; and in others, they were cut out of the rocks. See Matt. xxvii. 60. John xi. 38. The entrance into these sepulchres was by a descent over a number of steps. The roofs were generally arched; and some of them were so spacious, as to be supported by colonades. They admitted no light, being closed by a large stone, placed at the opening of a narrow entrance. See the description of our Lord's sepulchre, Matt. xxvii. 60. Luke xxiii. 53. The different kinds of sepulchres, with the very walls of the inclosures, were constantly kept clean and whitewashed. Hence our Lord upbraids the scribes and pharisees with being *like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outside, but within are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.* Matt. xxiii. 27, 28. It was in such sepulchres as have been described, that the demoniacs, mentioned in the eighth chapter of Matthew, had their dwelling.

The grief of the Jews, and other Orientals, on an occasion of death, was, as it is at this day in the East, very extreme in its expressions. As soon as a person dies, the females in the family, with a loud voice, set up a sorrowful cry. They continue it as long as they can, without taking breath, and the first shriek of wailing dies away in a low sob. After a short space of time, they repeat the same cry, and thus continue it for eight days. Every day, however, it becomes less frequent, and less audible. The manner of expressing overwhelming grief was to rend their garments, tear their hair or beard, scatter dust and ashes in the air, or place them upon their heads, or sit down upon ashes. They fasted, abstained from the comforts of life, and laid aside every ornament. They clothed themselves in sackcloth, and in sable robes, made of cheap and coarse stuff.

The time of mourning for the dead was longer, or shorter, according to the dignity of the person deceased. In the time of Christ, the ceremonies indicative of grief, continued eight days, during which time they shut them-

selves up, for the most part, in their houses; or, if some extraordinary occasion forced them to appear in public, they went bareheaded, and without shoes. This explains the reason why Ezekiel, when he was commanded to abstain from the rites of mourning, was directed to bind the tire upon his head, and to put shoes upon his feet. It was, however, a custom of the Jews, to visit the sepulchres of their deceased friends, three days; for so long, they supposed, their spirits hovered about them. But when they perceived that their visage began to change, all hopes of a return to life were at an end. From the narrative of St. John, respecting the death and resurrection of Lazarus, it appears, however, that in Judea, persons were accustomed to visit the tombs of their deceased relations after the third day, to lament their loss, and give vent to their grief. If this had not been a common practice, the people who came to comfort the sisters of Lazarus, would not so readily have concluded, when Mary went out suddenly to meet Christ, "*She goeth to the grave to weep there.*"

The Hebrews used to compose elegies on the death of those who had held a distinguished rank in society. See 2 Samuel iii. 33. It was usual for those who were present at a house of mourning, to chant in melancholy strains the virtues of the deceased. To their songs of lamentation, they added the sound of musical instruments of the melancholy kind. Thus, when our Lord raised the daughter of Jairus, when he came to the house, he found "*the minstrels and the people making a noise.*" The custom, in the time of our Saviour, was for the musicians to begin the dirge, and for those who were present to follow, beating their breasts and keeping time with the instrument. Sometimes, as may appear from the narrative just referred to, many persons were assembled uttering cries of mourning when any one expired. This usage is still retained in the East, and is considered as a mode of paying honour to the deceased.

A custom prevailed in Palestine, in Phrygia, and afterwards among the Greeks and Romans, for the friends and relations of the deceased to hire professional mourners to at-

tend funeral processions. This office generally fell to the lot of women, who strove, by their doleful lamentations, to extort grief from those who were present. The children, in the streets through which they passed, often suspended their sports, to imitate the sounds, and joined in the doleful expressions of grief. Sometimes part of the children naturally refused to join with the others. It is this which is referred to in the words used by our Saviour: "*We have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented.*" The following passage in Jer. ix. 17, 18, proves, that hiring female mourners was formerly the custom among the Jews. "*Call for the mourning women, that they may come, and let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters.*"

The funeral ceremonies of the Jews were finished, by rolling the closing stone to the door of the sepulchre; after which, the lamentations were renewed. Those persons who lived near to the mourners, prepared food for them, in order to refresh them after such a

scene of suffering and grief. These refreshments were sometimes called *the bread of bitterness*, and sometimes the *cup of consolation*. See Jer. xvi. 7. Ezekiel xxiv. 17.

LETTER XXV.

On the Character of Herod, Tetrarch of Galilee.

My dear Nieces,

In a former letter I mentioned the cruel and vindictive character of Herod the Great, who murdered the infants of Bethlehem, wishing to involve the Saviour of the world in their destruction. Ambition and jealousy induced him to commit this atrocious act. He was conscious that his seat on the throne was insecure, being an Idumean by birth, who had received his kingdom from the Romans, and acted as their viceroy. Herod, soon after the massacre of the infants, suffered a most torturing and horrid death.

Herod Antipas, his son, tetrarch of Galilee, who beheaded John the Baptist, is represented as a man of a cruel and deceitful character. He recommended himself with great art to the Jews, by pretending a love for their reli-

gion; while, intent upon his own private interests, he servilely flattered the Roman emperor. The Herodians, formerly mentioned, were his creatures and spies, who spread themselves over the country, to hear the conversation of the people concerning their master, and were secretly ordered to watch the discourses and proceedings of our Saviour. These facts illustrate the propriety of our Lord's reply to those who advised him to flee from the machinations of Herod. "*Go ye, and tell that fox*," &c. Luke xiii. 32. This title was properly applied; for Herod was artful as well as cruel.

The Evangelists relate Herod's unlawful marriage with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom, in violation of all the laws of hospitality, he seduced, while a guest in his brother Philip's house. Josephus informs us, that Herodias was grand-daughter to Herod the Great, and, consequently, she was niece both to Philip her former, and Herod her latter husband.

It appears from Mark vi. 20. that Herod had taken much notice of John the Baptist;

had listened to his instructions with apparent satisfaction, and had done many things in consequence of his exhortations. But John, being a prophet, and not a courtier, had the magnanimity to reprove Herod for his incestuous adultery. The tetrarch, exasperated at the boldness of John, "*laid hold of him, and bound him, and put him in prison, and wished to kill him. But he feared the multitude, because they accounted John a prophet.*" Yet notwithstanding his resentment against the Baptist, the character of that excellent man, his sanctity, disinterestedness, and even his courage in reproving his profligacy, commanded his veneration, and excited his fears; for we are told expressly, that "*Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man.*"

According to Josephus, the motive which induced Herod to imprison and kill the Baptist, was his jealousy of his popularity, and fear lest he should excite the people to rebel. John came in the wilderness of Judea, and proclaimed that the "*kingdom of heaven was at hand.*" This jealous prince, like Herod,

would naturally understand as an annunciation to the Jews, that *the great king*, who should rescue them from the Roman yoke, and dethrone the Herodian family, was about to make his appearance. This mistaken notion, which he cherished in common with the Jews at this time, must necessarily have filled him with consternation. He therefore seized and imprisoned the man whose popularity he dreaded, though even he could not but feel respect for his integrity.

In the mean time, the vindictive and malicious Herodias, used every artifice to keep alive, and inflame the resentment of Herod, and wearied him with continual entreaties to put John to death. But, however desirous Herod was of gratifying Herodias, his fear of the people induced him, for a time, to resist her importunities, though he still kept John in prison; while Herodias only waited a favourable opportunity to effect his destruction.

It has been supposed, that the circumstances related by the Evangelists, as leading immediately to the death of John, were only a part of a preconcerted scheme, a mere artifice, on the

part of Herod, arranged by him with Herodias. He had determined on the execution of the Baptist; but wished to assume the appearance of ordering it unwillingly; of being taken by surprise, and only doing it under the compulsion of an oath. He hoped, in this way, to screen himself from part of the odium of the action, and to save himself from some of the consequences of destroying a man, whose popularity was one principal cause that he put him to death. On his birth day, as is related, he gave an entertainment to his court and the principal officers of his army. At this entertainment, Salome, the daughter of Herodias by her former husband Philip, as a peculiar and very uncommon compliment, came and danced before the company. This young lady, probably, possessed great external accomplishments; and her manner was very graceful, so that Herod appeared delighted, and promised with an oath to give her whatever she should ask, though it were "*the half of his kingdom.*" Salome, being previously instructed by her mother, requested that the head of John the Baptist might be given to

her in a charger, or a large dish. Herod assumed a show of great regret on this occasion, but pretended, that, out of regard to his oath, he could not refuse. He therefore ordered John to be beheaded, and his head presented to the young lady, who carried it to her mother. It was, and still continues to be, a custom in the East, to produce the heads of those ordered to be put to death, as a proof that they have been really executed.

It appears that, after this atrocious act, Herod was pursued by the horrors of a guilty conscience. For though, like most people of rank, he had probably embraced the opinions of the Sadducees, who denied the immortality of the soul and the resurrection; yet conscious of his crimes, his fears overruled the errors of his sect, and his terrified imagination represented John the Baptist, risen from the dead, and armed with the power of working miracles, for the purpose, he perhaps imagined, of punishing him for this murder, as well as for his other wicked deeds.

The just judgments of God overtook all the actors in this tragic scene. Herod's unlawful connexion with Herodias, proved the cause of his ruin. Josephus informs us, that, in order to marry this wicked woman, he divorced his first wife, the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia, who, resenting Herod's behaviour to his daughter, declared war against him, and totally defeated his army, with great slaughter. This, says Josephus, the Jews considered as a judgment of heaven against the tetrarch, for the murder of John the Baptist.

After this event, Herodias, inflamed with envy, upon hearing that her brother, Agrippa, was made king by Caligula, the then emperor, almost compelled Herod to go to Rome, to obtain similar preferment for himself. The emperor, having been informed of his bad conduct, and justly suspecting his loyalty to him, instead of granting his request, banished him and his wife to Lyons, in France, where they died in poverty and misery.

LETTER XXVI.

Account of Pilate.

My dear Nieces,

I will now give you a brief account of Pilate, the Roman governor, during whose administration our Lord was condemned and crucified.

In the 12th or 13th year of Tiberias, the Roman emperor, Pontius Pilate was appointed governor of Judea. He began his career, by bringing, one night, into Jerusalem, Roman ensigns, having upon them images of the emperor, which he designed to set up in the city. The Jews regarded these images with religious abhorrence, as a violation of the second commandment. They fell at his feet, beseeching him to remove them. Upon their continuing their entreaties, day after day, he posted soldiers at a private place, ordering them, upon a signal given by him, to put the suppliants to death. But finding they prefer-

red death to enduring such a supposed violation of their law, he desisted from his purpose, and caused the images to be removed.

St. Luke mentions the "*Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.*" They were, probably, the followers of Judas Gaulonites, who denied the lawfulness of paying tribute to Cæsar, and whom, assembled at the temple to offer sacrifices at the Passover, Pilate took the opportunity of attacking, and putting to death. He also made a terrible slaughter of the Jews, when they attempted to hinder him from taking money from their corban, or sacred treasury, which he spent in building an aqueduct in Jerusalem. The whole of his administration was, according to Josephus, one continual scene of rapine, venality and cruelty.

According to the Evangelists, the Jewish council, having, as they pretended, convicted Jesus of blasphemy, went with him before this unrighteous governor, in order that he might pronounce the sentence of death upon him. The conduct of Pilate, when our Lord stood before him to be judged, is very remarkable.

His extreme reluctance to pass sentence upon him, forms a striking contrast to his merciless behaviour in general. He was, indeed, fully convinced of his innocence; but in the former atrocious cruelties he had perpetrated, he made no scruple of confounding the innocent with the guilty. His unwillingness to condemn Jesus cannot, therefore, be ascribed to a nice regard to justice. It was partly owing to his hatred and contempt of the Jewish nation, which led him to disregard their complaints and accusations; and partly to his having been previously informed, of what now evidently appeared to him, that the prosecution was carried on, not on account of any offence against the laws of the Romans, or Jews, but from enmity and hatred to Christ. For the Evangelist, Matthew, expressly informs us, that "He knew that *for envy* they had delivered him."

The Jews accused our Lord before the tribunal of Pilate, *of perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself was the Christ; a king!* In this charge they addressed themselves with

great dexterity to Pilate's passions and fears. As a Roman governor, this was an accusation to which it was necessary for him to give some attention; and he exposed himself to considerable danger, by his hesitation and reluctance.

In order to prepare us for the issue of this trial, we must keep in mind, that, though Pilate, at the commencement of his government, treated the Jews with great haughtiness and contempt, yet, in the progress of his administration, he found it necessary to study their favour, and attempted to secure it by some mean condescensions.

In the course of our Lord's trial, the Jews accused him of making himself *the Son of God.* The Evangelist, John, informs us, that "*when Pilate heard that saying he was the more afraid.*" Doubtless he recollected the miracles, said to have been performed by Jesus, and therefore suspected that he was, in reality, the son of a god. For the religion the governor professed led him to acknowledge the existence of demigods and heroes, or men descended from the gods. The heathens also

believed that the gods appeared upon earth in the form of men. Pilate, therefore, probably feared that our Saviour was really something more than man, and that some judgment would befal him, if he consented to his death; there being many examples, in the Pagan mythology, of persons who were severely punished for insults to the gods, or their favourites and attendants.

When urged by the accusers of our Lord to condemn him, Pilate hesitated, deliberated, and remonstrated, in order to moderate their rage, and reduce them to reason. After three repeated examinations, he firmly declared, "*I find no fault in him.*" He thus exhibited his full conviction of the innocence and dignity of his character, and used various expedients to frustrate the malicious attempts of the Jews. The chief priests and rulers, apprehensive of the governor's design to release our Lord, cried, saying, "*If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend.*" This speech greatly alarmed Pilate. He well knew the jealous and vindictive temper of the emperor Tiberius; and that it was his practice to em-

ploy a large number of spies, to watch the conduct of all his officers, that nothing might be done in any of the provinces, which would in the least degree interfere with his authority. He was also sensible that the Jews were capable of misrepresenting him to the emperor, if he refused to comply with their cruel wishes. In this situation, actuated by the fear of losing his power, and the honours conferred on him by the emperor Tiberius, he delivered Jesus to be crucified.

The Evangelist informs us, that "*when Pilate saw he could prevail nothing, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it.*" To wash the hands as a symbol of innocence, was usual among the Jews. See Psalm xxvi. It was also practised by the heathens. By this ceremony, Pilate gave the most solemn and public testimony to the innocence of Jesus. And by this act, he endeavoured to exonerate himself from the guilt of this infamous transaction, and transfer it to the Jews.

Pilate, having unwillingly condemned our Lord, wrote an inscription, to be fixed on his cross: "*This is Jesus of Nazareth, king o the Jews.*" He caused the title to be inscribed in the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin languages, to intimate to all present, that it was for no crime that Jesus suffered. Pilate had repeatedly pronounced him innocent, in the course of his trial. At last, he makes the cross itself proclaim his innocence. We are not surprised that his conduct gave offence to the Jews, as it expressed so strongly a disapprobation of their conduct. They applied to him to have the title altered, but he firmly adhered to what he had done. The steadiness of Pilate, on this occasion, will not be a mystery, when we view it in connexion with his whole preceding conduct. It shews that, to the last, he was consistent with himself in his opinion of the innocence of Jesus.

It is with satisfaction we learn, that the sacrifice which this unrighteous judge made to his interests and ambition, did not contribute in the least to his security, and the advancement of his favorite objects. We learn from

good authority, that he was, not long after, removed from the government in disgrace, sent to Rome to answer for his crimes, and banished to Vienne in Gaul, where he languished for some time in great misery, and at last ended his life by suicide.

LETTER XXVII.

On the Miracles of Christ.

My dear Nieces,

The history of the Jews is full of miracles, from the time of Abraham to the Babylonish captivity. But, after the restoration of that people to their country, till the birth of Christ, there was an intermission of more than five centuries. John the Baptist was "*a prophet, yea, and more than a prophet;*" but it is expressly said of him, that he "*wrought no miracle.*" After so long an interval, it was reserved for our Lord himself to raise the attention of his people, by miraculous works; which, though at all times astonishing and awful, must have struck men with additional force, by the novelty of their appearance.

The genius of the Hebrew religion was rigorous and severe; and the miracles of Moses, for the greater part, were suited to inspire terror. He brought down hail and lightning up-

on the Egyptians, converted water into blood, inflicted grievous plagues, and smote all the first born in the land of Egypt. Before the Lord descended on Mount Sinai, awful precursors were sent to prepare his way. The miracles wrought to establish the Jewish religion, often involved the ruin of a multitude of transgressors; as, for instance, in the destruction of Korah and his accomplices. In some instances, however, the miracles which are recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures are of a character of unmixed benevolence, and resemble those by which our Lord confirmed the truth of that dispensation of mercy, which he brought to the world.

Almost all the miracles of Christ were acts of mercy, which evinced his tender sympathy with human sufferings, and harmonized with the nature of that kingdom, which consisted in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. For genuine moral sublimity, we can conceive nothing superior to these interpositions of divine power, blended with benevolence, and a tender concern for human sufferings. All his miracles were a continual testi-

mony of the interest he took in human happiness. His divine example and heavenly precepts illustrated and corroborated each other.

The miracles of Christ extended to the relief of every evil which is incident to suffering humanity. He caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and nerved the withered hand with strength. He made the maimed whole, and the bowed down straight, healed the leper, restored strength to the paralytic, and raised the dead to life.

It is remarkable, that, among the many miracles performed by our Lord, two only are of a penal nature, viz. that of destroying a herd of swine; and blasting the barren fig-tree. In respect to the first, it ought to be considered, that, though the Gadarenes were generally heathens, there were Jews in the city, who were led to transgress the Mosaic law, by feeding swine, in order to carry on a lucrative trade with the Romans. Herds of swine were forbidden property to the Hebrew nation. The law of Moses prohibited their being used for food. The law of Hyrcanus forbade the keeping of them for profit. The

keepers felt their guilt, and, dreading, perhaps, a more severe punishment, fled.

Our Lord's blasting the barren fig-tree, was a symbolical action, intended to intimate the ruin of the Jewish nation, for neglecting to improve their privileges; and to teach, that all mere outward professors of the Gospel, would share the same fate.

The Evangelist Mark informs us, that our Saviour, on his way to Bethany from Jerusalem, "*seeing a fig-tree afar off, having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon; but when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for the time of figs was not yet.*" *And Jesus said unto it,* "*May none eat fruit of thee hereafter forever.*" The season of figs, by which is meant the season for *gathering in figs*, being not yet come, our Lord might reasonably expect to find figs on this tree, which, from its luxuriant foliage, had so promising an appearance. According to Pliny, says Archbishop Newcome, the fig-tree in Judea shows its leaf after its fruit. Therefore on a tree which had leaves, one might look for fruit. The tree was a very in-

considerable loss in a country, where so much fruit abounded, and probably was no man's private property. But the moral was of advantage at the time, and continues a lesson of perpetual instruction. Thus the destruction of the barren fig-tree becomes a spiritual benefit to mankind wherever the Gospel is preached.

LETTER XXVIII.

On the symbolical Character of our Lord's Miracles.

My dear Nieces,

The works which our Lord performed were suited and designed, not only to prove the truth of his divine mission, by the display of supernatural power, but sometimes also to convey certain lessons of moral instruction, connected with the history of his religion. And this is a circumstance which widely distinguishes the miracles of Jesus, from all the artifices of imposters. This position may be illustrated by a few examples.

When, at his Lord's command, Peter let down his net, and, though he had hitherto toiled in vain, was surprisingly successful; this lesson was to prepare him for the equally astonishing success he should meet with, when on the authority of his divine Master, he should spread the net of the Gospel, and

gather converts into his church, becoming a *fisher of men.* When, by Peter's preaching, three thousand souls were added to the church, the type of the draught of fishes was abundantly fulfilled.

Christ healed the sick and the afflicted; and his beneficence, in this respect, was to be considered as a living figure, that he was the great Physician of souls. His curing all, promiscuously, who applied to him for relief, plainly shewed, that he "came not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."

Our Saviour gave eyes to the blind, in token that "he was the light of the world." John ix. 5. This miracle was a lively emblem of the efficacy of his instructions to illuminate the darkness of the human understanding.

The barren fig-tree, covered with leaves, which withered at Christ's rebuke, was, as has been intimated, a striking figure of the pharisaical religion, which consisted only in outward show; and of the rejection and fall of the Jewish nation.

Our Saviour's feeding the multitude, in a miraculous manner, may be regarded as emblematical of the truth, that he was the living bread which came down from heaven. The figure of meat and drink as denoting religious instruction, was familiar to Jews.

Our Lord's raising the dead was a miracle peculiarly suitable to him who came to bring life and immortality to light. Therefore when he raised Lazarus from the dead, he uttered these majestic words, "*I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*"

Accordingly in performing these miracles, or soon after, we often find our Saviour, when the memory of them was fresh in the minds of his hearers, directing his discourses to the spiritual lessons, which were conveyed by his miracles.

LETTER XXIX.

Of our Lord's Prophesies.

My dear Nieces,

Our Lord exhibited his prophetic character in various instances during his abode on earth, and gave ample proofs of his divine mission, by his prophecies as well as miracles. The accomplishment of his predictions is an attestation of his being sent by God.

Christ foretold his own death, and the various circumstances attending it, his resurrection and ascension, the conversion of the gentiles, the persecutions of the apostles, the rapid spread of his religion, and that all the powers of hell should never be able to prevail against it.

But none of our Saviour's prophecies are more surprising, than those relating to the destruction of Jerusalem, which are recorded by three Evangelists. See Matt. xxiv. Mark xiii. Luke xxi. The utter ruin of Jerusalem, the overthrow of the temple, and the disper-

sion of the Jews, is foretold, as to be accomplished in *that generation*, when there was far from being any appearance of such an event. The Jews were then at peace with the Romans, with whom they could have no prospect of contending with success; or, if they should have revolted, and been subdued, there was no example in all the Roman conquests of such a devastation being made in any country, as was foretold to take place in this. Josephus, who was an eye witness of the unparalleled sufferings of the Jews during the siege of their metropolis, remarks, that all the calamities that ever befel any nation, since the beginning of time, were far less than the miseries of his countrymen, during that awful period.

Our Saviour, in the course of his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, says, "*Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled;*" that is, until the great tribulation shall be experienced, which I have foretold shall attend the ruin of this devoted city. This shocking event took place about thirty-seven years from the time in

which our Lord uttered this prophecy; so that many then living witnessed its fulfilment, and among others the beloved disciple, John.

While speaking on the same subject, our Lord also predicts "*that the Gospel of the kingdom should be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations.*" It appears from the Acts of the Apostles, that the Christian religion was very widely spread, previously to the destruction of Jerusalem. Paul appeals to the extensive preaching of Christianity, as a known fact. "*Have they not heard? Yea, verily their sound has gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.*" *All the world* meant the Roman empire, the then *imperial world.* The professors of Christianity in Rome, as early as the reign of Nero, amounted to such multitudes, that they excited the jealousy of the Romans; and the first heathen persecution was commenced against them by that emperor.

Dr. Newton makes the following remarks on our Saviour's prediction concerning Jerusalem. "The Jews, who exclaimed, *his blood*

be upon us and our children! found their imprecation remarkably fulfilled in the destruction of their city and temple by Titus; and there seems to be some correspondence between their crime and their punishment. They put Jesus to death, when the nation was assembled to celebrate the Passover; and when the nation was also assembled to celebrate the same festival, Titus shut them up within the walls of Jerusalem. The rejection of the true Messiah was their *crime;* and the following of false Messiahs to their destruction, was their *punishment.* They sold, and bought, Jesus as a slave; and they themselves were afterwards sold, and bought, at the lowest prices. They preferred a robber, and murderer, to Jesus, whom they crucified between two thieves; and they themselves were afterwards infested with bands of thieves and robbers. They put Jesus to death, lest the Romans should come and take away their place and nation; and the Romans did come and take away both. They crucified Jesus before the walls of Jerusalem; and before the walls of this city, they themselves were crucified in

such numbers, that, it is said, room was wanted for the crosses, and crosses for the bodies."

Since in this letter, I can only give you, my young friends, a few hints respecting the destruction of Jerusalem; and as the exact fulfilment of our Saviour's predictions renders this subject peculiarly interesting, I must refer you to my History of the Jews. When you can spare time to peruse so large a work, I wish you to read Josephus' Wars of the Jews.

LETTER XXX.

Of the Forms of Salvation in the East; and our Lord's Farewell Address to his Apostles.

My dear Nieces,

I will in this letter give you an account of the forms of salutation among the Jews, and other nations of the East; the characteristics of which consist, not merely in the attitudes in which they put themselves, but in the expressions they make use of, which have frequently something very devout and sublime in them.

The most common form among the ancient Hebrews was, "May peace and every blessing be yours." "*God be gracious to thee, my Son!*" were the words with which Joseph received Benjamin. Gen. xliii. 29. This would be called, in Europe or in our own country, a benediction; but it is a simple salutation in the language of Asia, and is there used instead of those offers and assurances of service, which it is the custom to make use of

in the Western countries, on addressing, or taking leave of an acquaintance.

When the Arabs salute each other, it is usually in these terms, "Peace be with you." In saying this, they lay their right hand upon their heart. The answer is, "With you be peace." Elderly persons frequently add, "And the mercy and blessing of God." The Mahometans of Egypt and Syria will not salute a Christian in this manner. They content themselves with saying, "Friend, how do you do;" or, "Good day to you."

The antiquity of the salutation, "Peace be with you," and the implied idea, that if a person enjoys peace, all is well with him, appears from the earliest accounts we have of patriarchal manners. Thus Jacob directs Joseph: "*Go, see the peace of thy brethren.*" Even in the camp, David asked his brethren of their *peace.* There are various instances of this phraseology in the Old Testament.

It cannot easily be imagined how eloquent the people of the East, of all religions, are, in wishing peace and the mercies of God, to one another, on all occasions; and even they

who have little acquaintance with those to whom they speak. Yet, at the same time, it appears, that their character has ever been that of a very deceitful people. David says, "*They bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly.*" Psalm lxii. 4. This account, however, explains the ground on which the Scriptures so often call the salutations and farewells in the East, by the term *blessings*.

Peace was our Lord's usual and common salutation; and was peculiarly suitable from him, who was styled the *Prince of Peace*. His manner of taking leave of his apostles is extremely pathetic and affectionate. "*Peace I leave wish you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.*" This was his farewell blessing, the hallowed benediction of parting love, a legacy of inestimable value, the peace of God which passeth understanding; a blessing which the world cannot give, nor take away, the foretaste of eternal felicity in heaven. This peace is given, not as the world gives; not like the good wishes of selfish men, which often come not from the heart, and which, even if they

were consecrated by sincerity, have little power to calm inquietude, or mitigate affliction. But the efficacy of our Saviour's parting blessing is equal to its sincerity. To the beloved companions of his sufferings, during his abode on earth, he gives his parting benediction, appropriate and permanent, and on principles, and with authority, infinitely superior to all the benedictions of earthly friends, he blessed his apostles with the gift of peace, or imperishable joy.

After he had conquered death, and rose triumphant from the grave, he repeatedly addressed his disciples with the same affectionate salutation. See Luke xxiv. 36. John xx. 13—21.

QUESTIONS

FOR THE

LETTERS ON THE GOSPELS.

LETTER II.

1. What was the general state of the world when Jesus Christ appeared upon earth?
2. What were the principal objects of worship among heathen nations at this period?
3. In what places did the heathens worship their gods?
4. To whom were the care of their temples and the direction of their religious rites committed?
5. What were the general characters of the pagan priests?
6. Was the pagan religion calculated to promote the practice of moral virtue?
7. What were the consequences of the heathen theology?

LETTER III.

8. Who was king in Judea at the time when Jesus Christ was born?
9. What was his character?
10. Who rebuilt the second temple?
11. By whom were the Jews governed, after Herod's death?

12. How far did the authority of the Romans extend over the Jews?
13. What was the general character of the Jewish rulers who were placed in subordination to the Roman government?
14. Were there not some examples of eminent piety still remaining in the Hebrew nation?
15. In what character did the Jews expect their Messiah to appear?

LETTER IV.

16. What distinguished the Samaritans from the Jews, in the time of our Saviour?
17. What were the doctrines of the Pharisees?
18. What those of the Sadducees?
19. What those of the Essenes?
20. What those of the Herodians and Gaulonites?
21. What were the doctrines of the Oriental Philosophy?

LETTER V.

22. In what city of Palestine was Jesus born?
23. Where was he baptized?
24. Where did he spend the first years of his life?
25. What was the opinion of the Jews respecting Nazareth?
26. Where did our Lord perform his first public miracle?
27. Where did he usually reside during the greatest part of the time of his ministry?
28. Upon what sea or lake did our Saviour perform the miracle of walking upon the waves?
29. Where is Mount Tabor situated?

remain in Sichem, their an-

province of Judea?
Lord enter Jerusalem?
lamentation over the city?
Saviour betrayed by Judas?
Lazarus from the dead?
?
ascend to heaven?

TER VI.

were the Jews left after the de-
and temple?
1. Wh Cochebas, their false Messiah
2. Wh in the reign of Adrian, to rebel
h government?
3. In the emperor Adrian make in
4. To rebuilt the city?
r inflictes be inflicted on the Jews?
5. Wh the emperor Constantine make
6. Wa
p of the Holy Sepulchre?
7. Wh reated by Constantine and his

would the temple of Jerusalem?
8. Who
Cl STER VII.
Wha go, on seeing the multitude?
Wh design of his discourse on the

49. What blessing did our Saviour pronounce upon the poor in spirit?
50. What upon those that mourn?
51. What upon the meek?
52. What upon those who hunger and thirst after righteousness?
53. What upon the merciful?
54. What upon the pure in heart?
55. What upon peace-makers?
56. What upon those persecuted for righteousness' sake?
57. To what did our Lord compare his disciples?
58. Why were they to let their light shine?

LETTER VIII.

59. What were the prevailing opinions among the Jews of the alterations that should take place during the government of the Messiah?
60. What did our Lord say of the Scribes and Pharisees?
61. How did the Jewish teachers interpret the sixth commandment?
62. How did our Saviour interpret it?
63. What was meant by the judgment?
64. What by the council?
65. What does our Lord say was the last punishment?
66. What does our Saviour enjoin respecting bringing our gift to the altar?
67. What does our Lord say with respect to swearing?
68. What did Jesus say in relation to the passage in Deut. xix. "An eye for an eye," &c.
69. How are we to treat our enemies, and those who hate and curse us?
70. How perfect are we commanded to be?

LETTER IX.

71. What caution did our Lord give respecting doing our alms, or acts of kindness and charity?
72. How and for what purpose did the hypocrites do their alms?
73. How are we directed to do our alms?
74. Where did the Pharisees love to pray?
75. How did our Lord direct his disciples to pray?
76. How did the Pharisees fast?
77. How ought we to fast?

LETTER X.

78. Where did our Saviour exhort us not to lay up treasures?
79. What does he say we cannot serve?
80. To what objects did he direct our view, to preserve us from anxiety concerning our subsistence?
81. What are we first to seek?

LETTER XI.

82. What are we commanded in respect to judging?
83. What are we to understand by the precept, "Give not that which is holy to dogs," &c.
84. What encouragement have we to pray for divine assistance?
85. To what does our Lord allude in mentioning the strait gate?
86. To what animal are false teachers compared?
87. How are we to know false teachers?
88. To what does our Saviour compare those who hear his sayings and do them?
89. To what does he liken those who hear his sayings and do them not?

90. Why were the people astonished at hearing our Lord's instructions?

LETTER XII.

91. When Jesus entered into Capernaum, for whom was application made to him for his healing aid?
92. What message did the centurion send to our Lord when he was coming?
93. To what did the centurion compare the power which he believed Jesus had over diseases?
94. What did Jesus say to the people concerning the faith of the centurion?
95. What were the virtues by which the centurion was distinguished?

LETTER XIII.

96. Of what did the scribes and pharisees accuse the disciples? Matt. xv.
97. Of what did our Lord accuse the scribes and pharisees?
98. What did the scribes and pharisees teach respecting our duty to our parents?
99. Were not the pharisees very strict in observing their traditions?
100. Why did the pharisees and sadducees desire a sign from heaven?
101. What kind of miracles did they demand?
102. What answer did our Lord give the pharisees and sadducees when they demanded a sign from heaven?
103. How was Jonah a sign of the Messiah?

LETTER XIV.

104. What was the character and condition in life of those whom Jesus chose for his twelve apostles?
105. What were they to do when they entered a town or city?
106 What were they to do to those cities which would not receive them?
107. What did our Lord compare his disciples to, when he sent them forth to preach?
108. What did he command them to be?
109. How did he inform them they should be treated?
110. What did he caution them against?
111. How did our Saviour encourage them to trust in his providence?
112. What does he foretel would be the consequence of his coming into Judea?

LETTER XV.

113. What did our Lord say of his indigent condition while on earth?
114. How did our Saviour answer the ruler who applied to him to know what he should do to obtain eternal life?
115. How did the young man regard what Jesus told him?
116. What did Jesus then say to his disciples?
117. What are the allusions to natural history in our Lord's reproof to the scribes and pharisees?
118. Does our Lord reprove the scribes and pharisees in the character of a judge, or of a prophet?

LETTER XVI.

119. What metaphor does Isaiah make use of to describe the gentleness of our Saviour's administration?

120. What virtues does our Lord earnestly enforce upon his followers?
121. What did Jesus teach his disciples by setting a child in the midst of them?
122. Which of the disciples desired our Lord "to send fire from heaven upon the Samaritans?"
123. What was our Lord's reply to their request?
124. What was the design of our Lord in washing his disciples' feet?
125. How did our Lord, while on the cross, pray for his enemies?

LETTER XVII.

126. What is a parable in its strictest sense?
127. By what nations was this figurative way of conveying instruction most used?
128. Why did the Eastern nations use parables?
129. Of what kind are our Lord's parables?
130. What are the advantages of teaching by parables?

LETTER XVIII.

131. What is the narrative contained in the parable of the good Samaritan?
132. How did the priest and Levite regard the wounded man?
133. What did the Samaritan do?
134. Who was neighbour to the unfortunate man?
135. Where was the scene of the parable laid?
136. Where, and on what occasion, was it delivered?

LETTER XIX.

137. On what occasion did our Lord deliver the parable of the prodigal son?
138. What is the story related in this parable.

139. What did the youngest son of a certain man do?
140. What did he say to his father when he returned to him?
141. How was he received by his father?
142. How did his elder brother behave at his return?
143. What does our Lord inculcate by this parable?

LETTER XX.

144. To whom was the parable of Dives and Lazarus particularly addressed?
145. What description does our Lord give of the principal characters mentioned in the narrative?
146. What was the situation of Dives after death?
147. What that of Lazarus?
148. Whom did the rich man see from his place of torment?
149. What did he say to Abraham?
150. What was Abraham's answer?
151. Why did the rich man wish to send Lazarus to his father's house?
152. Why did Abraham refuse his request?
153. What lessons are taught by this parable?

LETTER XXI.

154. To what does our Lord compare the kingdom of heaven in Matt. xxiii.?
155. What was the principal object of this parable?
156. Under what similitudes are the Jewish and Christian covenants frequently represented in Scripture?
157. How were the gracious invitations of the Gospel treated by the Jews?
158. How did the king treat those who rejected his invitation to the feast?

159. To what does the behaviour of the king allude?
160. After the king's invitation was rejected by those who first received it, what method did he take to procure guests?
161. What part of the parable alluded to the calling of the gentiles?
162. What is meant by the wedding garment?
163. Why was the king's indignation excited against him who came to the feast without this garment?

LETTER XXII.

164. On what occasion did our Lord deliver the parable of the pharisee and publican?
165. What were the general characteristics of the Pharisees?
166. What of the publicans?
167. What was the prayer of the pharisee?
168. What that of the publican?
169. What was the result of their prayers?
170. What is the lesson taught by this parable?

LETTER XXIII.

171. To what historical facts does the parable of the nobleman, in Luke xix. allude?
172. When, and on what occasion, was it delivered?
173. What sum did he leave his servants to trade upon during his absence?
174. How did they improve the trust committed to them?
175. How did the nobleman behave to his servants on his return?
176. What is taught by this parable?

LETTER XXIV.

177. How did the Jews treat the body after death?

178. Where were their sepulchres generally situated?
179. In what manner do the Jews and Eastern nations express their grief for their deceased friends?
180. What was the office of the mourning women?
181. How were the funeral ceremonies of the dead concluded?

LETTER XXV.

182. What was the character of Herod the tetrarch?
183. What name does our Saviour give him?
184. What account do the Evangelists give of him?
185. What was his conduct towards John the Baptist?
186. When Herod heard of the fame of Jesus, whom did he say he was?
187. What was the occasion of his enmity to John?
188. What time did he perpetrate this murder?
189. What befell him and Herodias after this atrocious act?

LETTER XXVI.

190. In what manner did Pontius Pilate introduce his government into Judea?
191. What was his conduct during his administration?
192. How did he behave when our Lord stood before him to be judged?
193. What was the cause of his extreme reluctance to pass sentence on our Lord?
194. What accusation did the Jews bring against our Saviour before Pilate's tribunal?
195. Why was the governor more afraid when the Jews accused our Lord of making himself the Son of God?
196. How did Pilate witness the innocence of our Saviour?

197. What prevailed upon Pilate to deliver him to be crucified?
198. What did Pilate do to bear witness to the innocence of our Lord after he had condemned him?
199. In what way did he afterwards express his opinion of our Lord's innocence?
200. What befel Pilate after our Lord's crucifixion?

LETTER XXVII.

201. What kind of miracles were wrought to establish the Jewish religion?
202. Of what character were the miracles of Christ?
203. How did they differ from the miracles of Moses and the prophets?
204. Which of the miracles of our Lord were of a penal nature?
205. For what was the miracle of destroying the herd of swine intended?
206. What lesson is learnt from our Lord's blasting the barren fig-tree?

LETTER XXVIII.

207. What did our Lord teach by the large draught of fishes taken by Peter?
208. What by calming the tempest?
209. What by healing the sick and curing the various afflictions of suffering humanity?
210. What by feeding the multitude in a miraculous manner?
211. What by raising the dead?

LETTER XXIX.

212. What were our Lord's prophecies respecting the destruction of Jerusalem?

213. What did our Lord say respecting the near approach of this great event?

214. Was the Christian religion propagated before the destruction of this city?

LETTER XXX.

215. What were the common forms of salutation among the ancient Hebrews?

216. What forms were, and still are, in use among the Arabs and Mahometans of Egypt and Syria?

217. How do the Mahometans salute Christians?

218. Were not the Eastern nations eloquent in good wishes and protestations of regard?

219. What leave did Christ take of his apostles?

220. How did it differ from the good wishes which are given by the world to their friends?

END.